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Fall 1996 • #1

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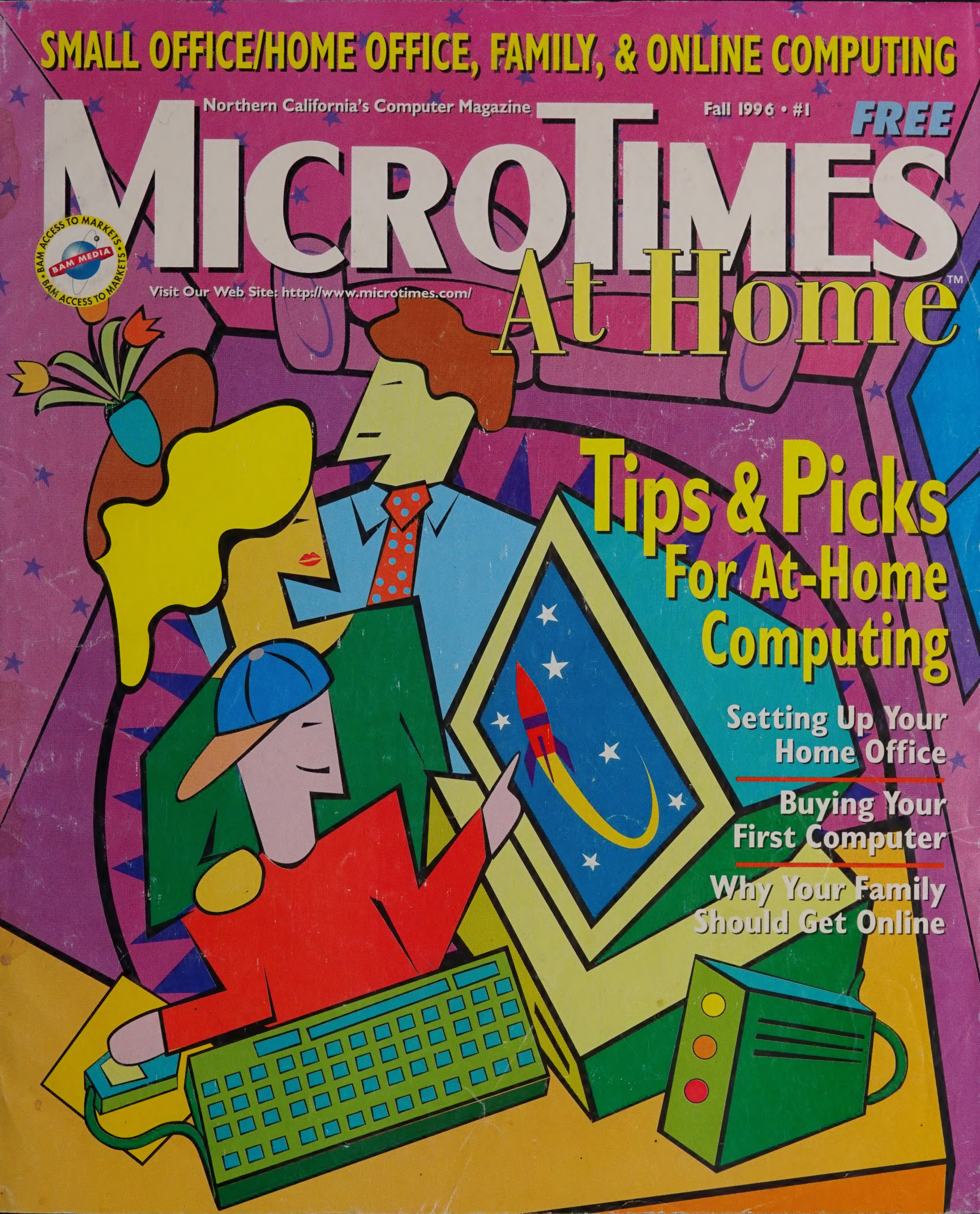

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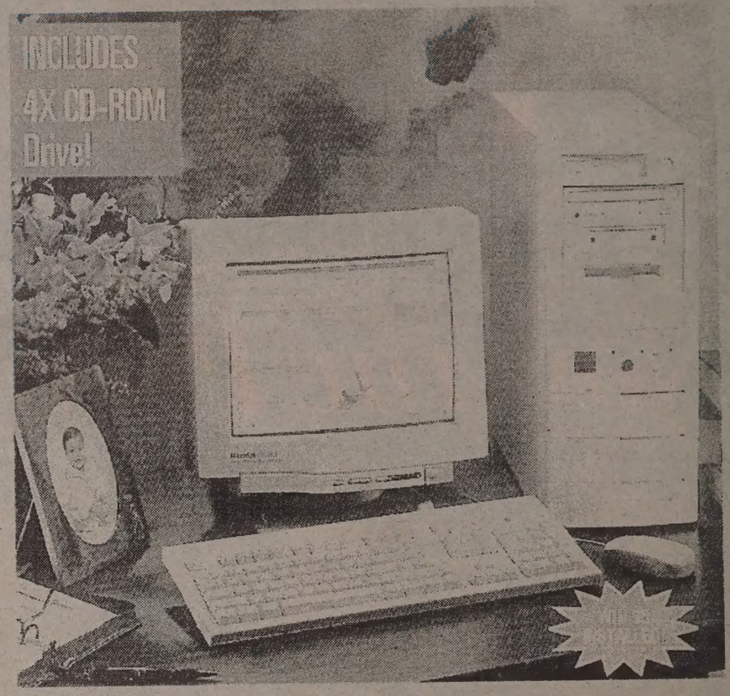

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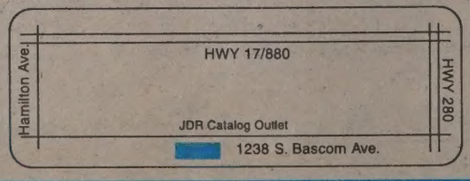

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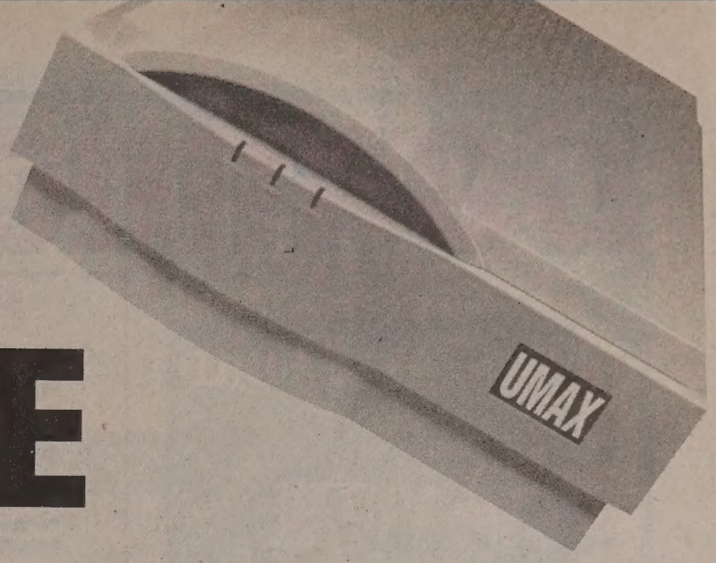

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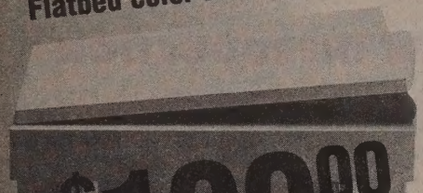

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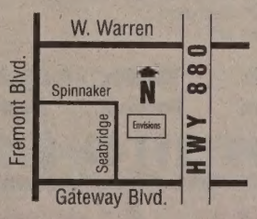

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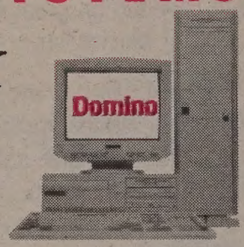

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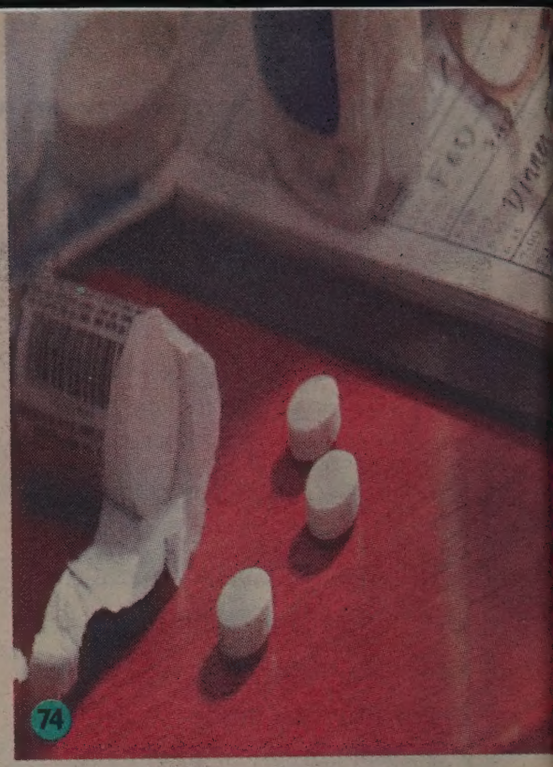
MicroTimes At Home



Welcome To MicroTimes At Home!

Some people reading this magazine are looking for their first computer; others, no doubt, already use a computer at work but are in the process of setting up a home office, or are just interested in checking out some of the more entertaining possibilities. Still others, we strongly suspect, are regular *MicroTimes* readers wondering what we're up to with this new venture. We're happy to see all of you!

In contrast to *MicroTimes* itself, *MicroTimes At Home* is aimed specifically at the home-based computer user, a group that ranges from first-time buyers looking for a likely (and affordable!) system for the kids to the quite distinct home office market, whether small business or corporate telecommuting. This premier issue is full of survival tips and other useful pointers–what to look for when you're shopping, how to get the most out of what you get, and what resources you can find online, on the Internet and elsewhere. The advice comes not only from the regular contributors to *MicroTimes*, but from our extended circle of family and friends, all of whom were once beginners and have now found interesting ways to use their home computers for fun and profit.

We hope you'll find this a valuable resource for your shopping and reference needs. We welcome your feedback so that when we publish the next issue in Spring 1997 it'll be even more useful.

Meanwhile, of course, we hope you'll be joining us as regular *MicroTimes* readers as well!

–Mary Eisenhart

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Features

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By Mike Markowitz
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62 **Tips & Picks For Home Computing**
Candid advice from writers, staff, family and friends about their favorite products, services, and ways to avoid trouble.

74 **Help When You Need It: What To Do When Something Goes Wrong**
By T.J. Hohmann
The world is not perfect, and neither is your computer experience. Still, your difficulties can be fleeting annoyances or epic tragedies, often depending on how you handle them. With the sage counsel in this article, you'll be well on the way to identifying and eliminating those pesky problems.

Family Computing

24 **Day One With Your New Computer**
By T.J. Hohmann
Resist the urge to tear the packaging to shreds and start working–a little patience and attention to detail now will save you hours of aggravation later.

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By Laura Bell
How to find your corner of cyberspace, whether your interest is stock trading, sports scores, or the kids' schoolwork.

Small Office/Home Office

42 **Home Office**
By Birrell Walsh
There's no one-size-fits-all in setting up the office that's going to let you get your work done effectively. Here's some advice on figuring out your needs and addressing them well.

55 **Telecommuting: What Is It? Is It For You?**
By Robert Moskowitz
A buzzword and a source of some controversy, telecommuting can be a win-win for employer and employee if handled correctly. This article explains the concept and offers some suggestions for smooth-running implementations.

Resources

100 **User Groups**
Especially for the first-time computer user, but also for the seeker of specialized knowledge, the local user group offers a wealth of helpful information. Here are listings of Bay Area groups, along with their contact information.

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Contact information for companies and products mentioned in this issue.

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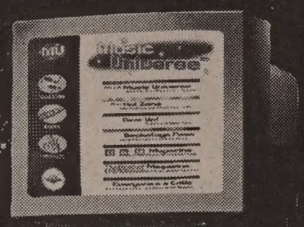

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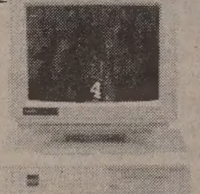

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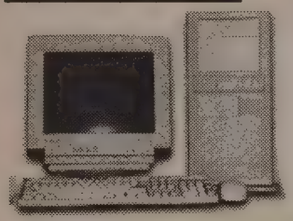

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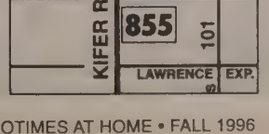

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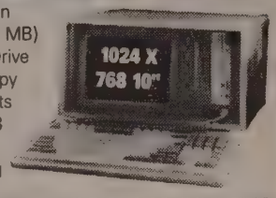

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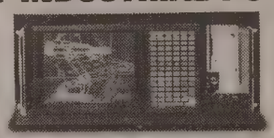

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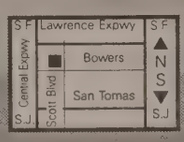

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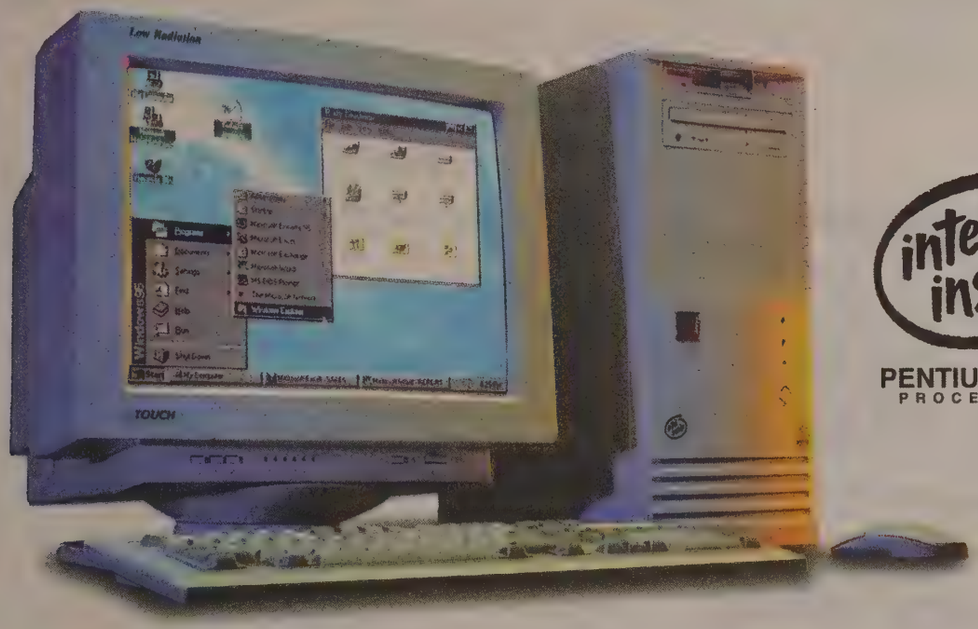

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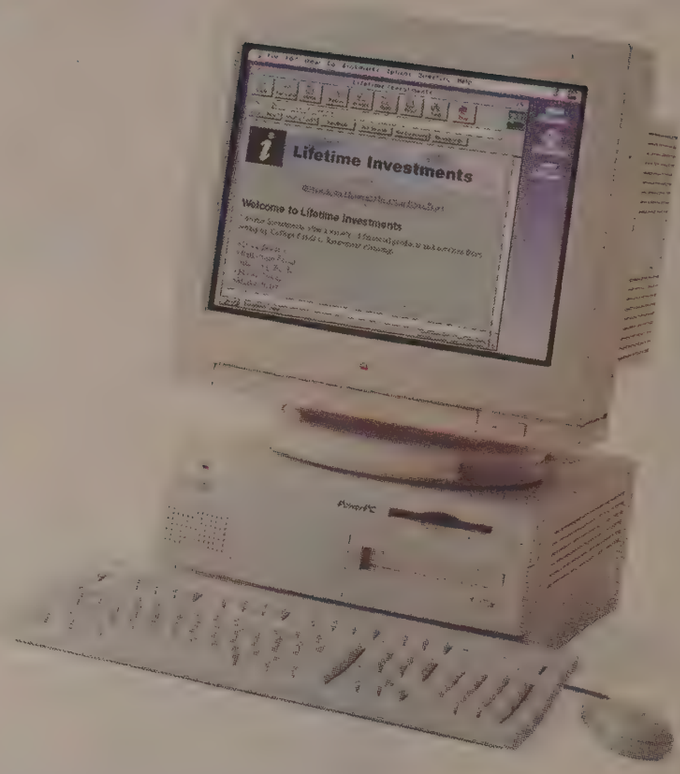
So You Wanna Buy A Computer?

Tips For The First-Time Buyer

By Mike Markowitz



A computer is only an appliance, but somehow, buying your first computer is not like buying a toaster or a lamp. It is a deeply personal event, more like buying your first car. The "information appliance" becomes an extension of the self. It becomes invested with symbolic meaning, just like a motor vehicle. Nobody gives a toaster a name, but many people name their computers, just as they might name a companion dog or cat.

A computer is simply a tool. Unlike most tools, however, computers are extraordinarily perishable items. A chisel that sits unused in a tool box will still be a usable chisel in twenty years. A sewing machine that sits unused in a closet will still be serviceable, with a bit of lubrication, after ten years. But a computer that sits underutilized on a desktop for two or three years will become a hopelessly obsolete piece of junk for most practical applications. The rate of change in the technology gives computer hardware the shelflife of overripe tomatoes.

The decision to buy a computer is rarely driven by necessity. You can probably live without a computer, certainly more easily than you can live without a car in most places. There is no single "right" reason for buying a computer, but there are many wrong reasons that you might reflect upon before writing that check or pulling out that credit card. Do you really need to buy a computer simply because your friends all have one? Do you really need a computer at home to do (unpaid, unrewarded, unappreciated...) office work at home? Do you really need a computer to study and learn subjects that you never had the time or motivation to learn from books?

You need a personal computer when it is the appropriate tool for the work at hand. That work may be writing, musical composition,

THE RATE OF CHANGE IN THE TECHNOLOGY GIVES COMPUTER HARDWARE THE SHELFLIFE OF OVERRIPE TOMATOES.

graphic art, accounting, or any other human activity for which suitable software exists.

What Computer To Buy?

Think for a moment about how you would make a decision about buying a new car.

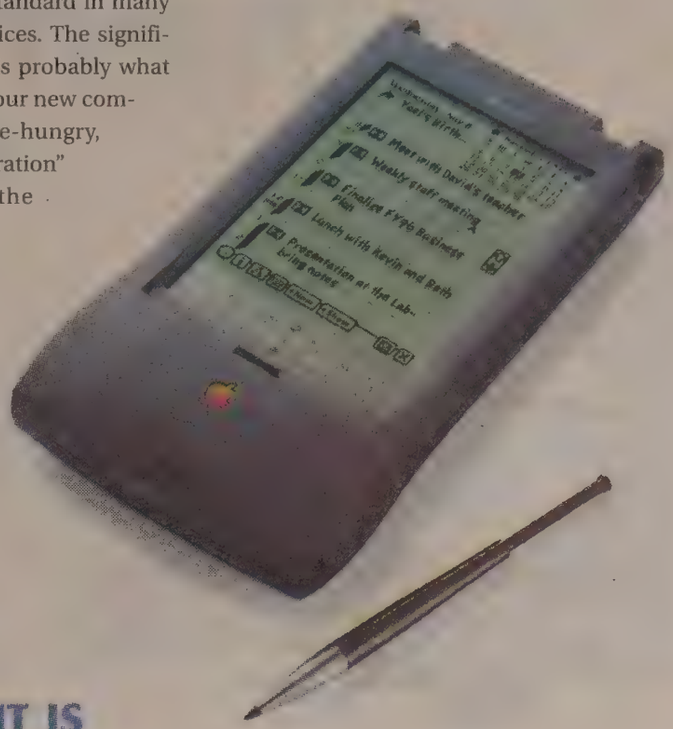
Cost might be dominant. You might want a luxury car packed with amenities, but your budget only allows a no-frills sub-compact. Brand-name reputation is a key issue, particularly when it comes to reliability. Most people want a car with good design, whether it reflects the comfort of good human engineering, or the sizzle of sexy styling.

All the same factors are at work when people make computer-buying decisions, but first you have to make a much more fundamental decision, a leap of faith. You have to choose a side: Windows or Macintosh?

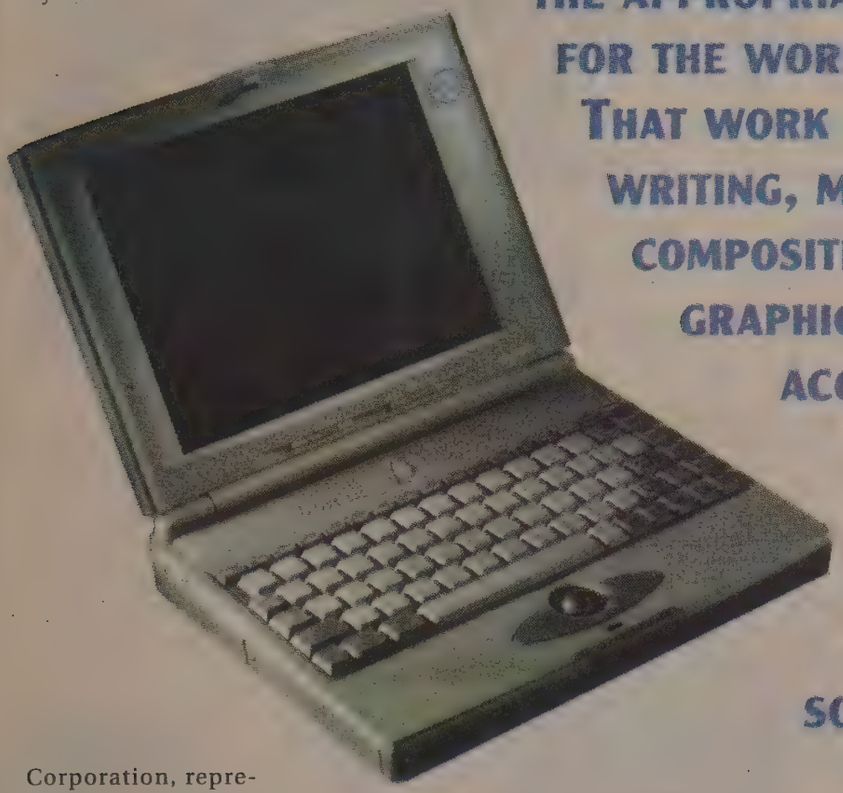
Windows, the operating system developed by Microsoft, and running mainly on computers that use microprocessors manufactured by Intel Corporation, represents about 85% of the North American personal computer market. It's hard to argue with an 85% market share.

Digression: many people still refer to Windows/Intel systems as "clones," harking back to the days when these industry-standard computers were designed to be functionally equivalent to the IBM Personal Computer in its various incarnations. When we say "Windows" we are actually describing a family of products. "Classic" Windows 3.1 is still standard in many corporate and government offices. The significantly improved Windows 95 is probably what you will find pre-installed on your new computer. Windows NT, a resource-hungry, high-performance, "next-generation" operating system would be the choice of many professionals, especially for applications where cost is no object.

Until recently, "Macintosh" meant a product of media-wracked, eternally troubled Apple Computer, but today there are several highly regarded Macintosh clones as well. Why would you choose a Mac? Well, historically, Mac has been the choice of educators, creative artists, and specialized "niche" markets like desktop publishing. Macs are still easier to set up, and generally easier to use than their competitors. The Mac user experience, at its best, is that everything works smoothly, the first time, with everything else—hardware, software, printers, scanners, etc. This was a significant advantage for many years, but the gap is rapidly narrowing.



YOU NEED A PERSONAL COMPUTER WHEN IT IS THE APPROPRIATE TOOL FOR THE WORK AT HAND. THAT WORK MAY BE WRITING, MUSICAL COMPOSITION, GRAPHIC ART, ACCOUNTING, OR ANY OTHER HUMAN ACTIVITY FOR WHICH SUITABLE SOFTWARE EXISTS.



For over ten years this writer was a fanatical Macintosh loyalist, but he is writing these words on a generic, no-frills Windows system he bought with his own money.

How Much Should You Spend?

Let's assume you are buying a brand-new computer (Buying a second-hand computer is a risky business unless you have some deep technical knowledge, or bring along a friend who does).

Let's define a complete "system" (whether Windows or Macintosh-based) as a computer (the box), a keyboard and mouse, and a basic 14" or 15" color monitor. The box normally includes a floppy disk drive, a hard disk drive with the basic software (operating system) already installed. A complete system often comes "bundled" with a suite of "free" software, which may or may not correspond to your needs—usually not. For most purposes, you should not consider buying a computer without a CD-ROM drive, since this is increasingly the way that new software is distributed.

You can expect to pay about $1500 for a reasonably complete name-brand "entry-level" computer. This might drop as low as $1200 for a no-name generic model, or rise as high as $1800

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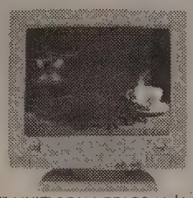

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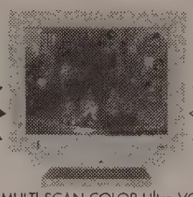

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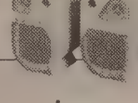

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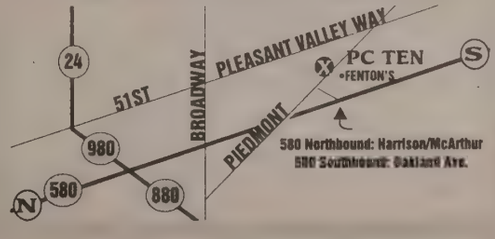


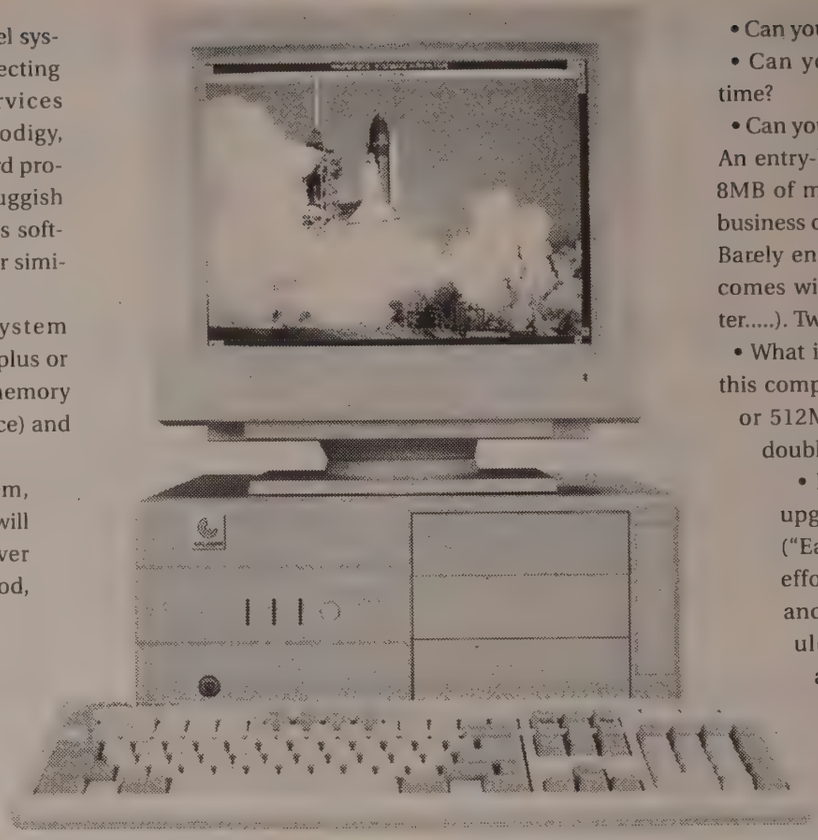
for a premium system. An entry-level system is perfectly adequate for connecting to one of the major online services (America Online, Compuserve, Prodigy, etc.), playing games, and simple word processing. Performance might be sluggish running one of the bloated business software "suites" like Microsoft Office, or similar products from Lotus or Corel.

A basic, standard business system should probably cost about $2500, plus or minus $500. This buys you more memory (RAM), more storage (hard disk space) and a faster processor.

A maxed-out, power-user system, with all the bells and whistles that will briefly give you bragging rights over the other users in your neighborhood, will set you back about $4000, plus or minus $1000. This buys you ample memory, vast storage capacity and a nice BIG monitor (17" is impressive, 19" or 20" is awesome.)

To summarize, you should never spend more on a computer than you expect to get back from it within two or three years. Within two or three years, the computer you buy today will be outdated and nearly worthless. What you "get back" from your computer investment may be measured in dollars of income, or it may be something intangible, like learning or pleasure.

Conventional wisdom says that the computer you really want will cost about $5000. The computer you really need probably costs rather less, unless you need to work with highly detailed mathematical models of the universe, digitized video, or intense color graphics. Price brackets remain fairly constant, but the capability and performance of what you get tends to increase sharply with each "generation" of hardware. A computer generation used to be about eighteen months, but the interval is rapidly shrinking. Radically new hardware "platforms" will probably be launched every year, just like car models.



YOU SHOULD NEVER SPEND MORE ON A COMPUTER THAN YOU EXPECT TO GET BACK FROM IT WITHIN TWO OR THREE YEARS. WHAT YOU "GET BACK" FROM YOUR COMPUTER INVESTMENT MAY BE MEASURED IN DOLLARS OF INCOME, OR IT MAY BE SOMETHING INTANGIBLE, LIKE LEARNING OR PLEASURE.

What You Really Need

Nobody ever regretted buying too much memory for a computer. This was true years ago when each megabyte of RAM cost hundreds of dollars, and it is even truer today, when a megabyte costs dozens of dollars, or less.

So what's a megabyte?

A megabyte is the unit of measurement for computer memory. A megabyte (MB) represents roughly a million characters of program code, text, or data. The computer's working memory consists of banks of chips (for obscure electronic reasons these are called "Random Access Memory" or "RAM" chips).

The size of your computer's memory determines many things:

- Can you run the latest software?
- Can you run multiple programs at one time?
- Can you work with really large data files?

An entry-level computer typically comes with 8MB of memory. NOT ENOUGH! A standard business computer typically comes with 16MB. Barely enough. A monster machine typically comes with 32 or 64MB (Ahhhhh, that's better.....). Two questions you may want to ask are:

- What is the maximum memory capacity of this computer? (Typical answers are 128, 256, or 512MB—notice how the numbers keep doubling?)
- How easy is it for me to expand or upgrade the memory on this computer? ("Easy" means you loosen one fastener, effortlessly slide the cover off the box, and casually snap a little plastic module—called a SIMM or DIMM—into an accessible, idiot-proof socket. "Not Easy" means you have to perform major disassembly, scattering screws, washers and components across the room, then break several fingernails while sweating heavily, trying to force the accursed module into place. "Real Easy" means that the store charges you fifty bucks to have some kid install the memory upgrade in the back room.)

The relentless advance of technology means that one computer can now have three different kinds of memory. Along with regular RAM, you may need some extra video memory (VRAM), which allows you to display more colors faster on a bigger monitor—1MB is standard, 2MB is ample for most applications. Then there is "cache" RAM. This is a special module of super high-speed memory, which the computer uses as a kind of scratchpad to store the most recently accessed data. This typically improves overall system performance by about 30%. Costly cache memory is doled out in kilobytes (1024KB = 1MB). 256KB is good, 512KB is better.

An entry-level computer these days comes with a 1GB (gigabyte) hard disk drive. A gigabyte is 1024 Megabytes. Computer geeks love those powers of two, don't they? A standard business computer should have a 2GB hard drive, and a monster machine should have even more. The

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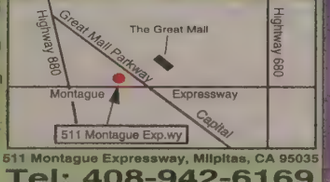

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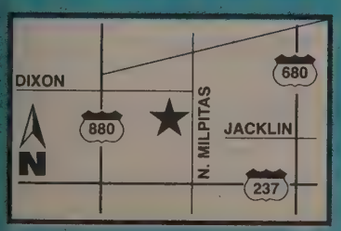

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main function of the hard drive is to hold the humongous files required by the operating system and your favorite software. Even games, which are normally played from a CD-ROM, usually need to deposit some start-up files on your hard drive.

There are many different removable mass-storage devices that you can use to archive files, or make a copy ("backup") of your hard disk contents in case of disaster. The inexpensive Iomega Zip Drive, which stores 100MB on a pocket-sized disk cartridge has become especially popular recently, in both the Windows and Macintosh worlds.

You need a modem. A modem is a computer's way of using the telephone. You couldn't live without a phone, and neither can your computer. Most Windows computers come with an internal modem and fax card. Most Macintosh computers don't. In either case, don't even consider a modem rated at less than 28.8 kilobits per second (kbps).

You probably need a printer. There are two basic choices. Laser printers are fast, with excellent print quality, but rather expensive (per page) unless you print at least 100 pages per week. Inkjet printers are inexpensive and very quiet. Many models offer a color option at little extra cost, but they can be infuriatingly slow. A good printer will outlast your computer. Stick with a trusted brand name like Hewlett-Packard, Apple, Epson or Canon.

Where To Buy

You might think that a computer store would be the best place to shop for a computer (Duh...). But there are quite a few options. You can increase your understanding of the jargon, the price ranges and the brand names by studying the advertisements in publications like this one and the glossy magazines like *PC World*, *Byte*, or *MacUser* and *Macworld*.

Computer stores fall into several categories. There are a few full-service superstore chains that offer a limited number of brand names at deep discounts. The superstores usually offer training and have complete repair and service departments. There are still many small businesses (mom-and-pop computer stores) that assemble their own systems from generic components. Then there are "value-added resellers" (VARs) that specialize in a particular market segment, like law firms, real estate, or music. You pay a little extra for the expertise of a VAR or consultant, but that can save you from costly mistakes.

A serious shopper will also want to check the prices and options at membership warehouse stores (very limited range of brands, fiercely

continued on page 90

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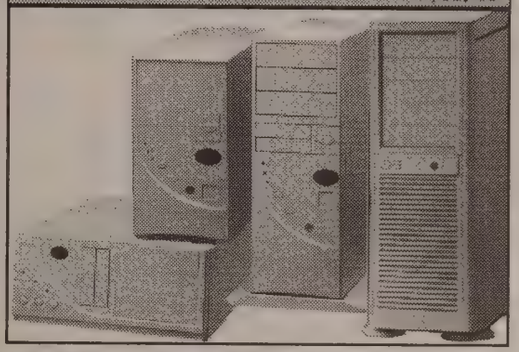

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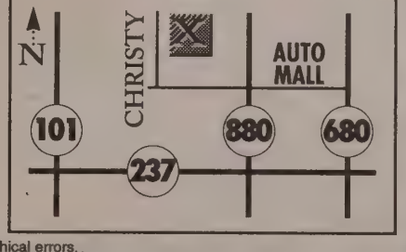

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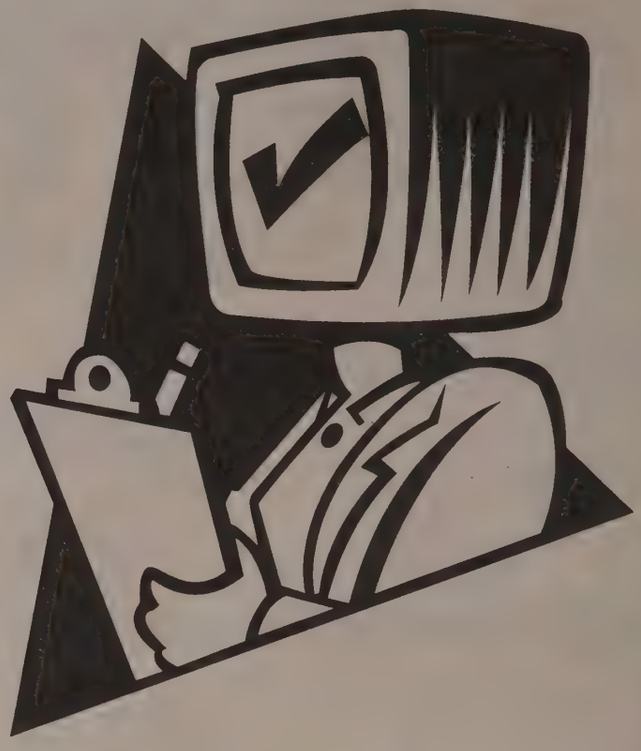
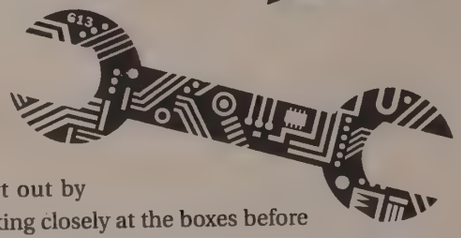
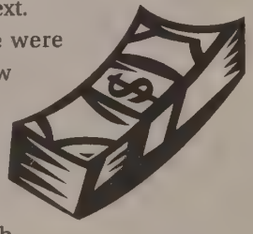
Patience Pays Off Later

By T. J. Hohmann





Okay, you've finally done it. You've gone out and purchased a new computer. You read the magazines, talked to friends, shopped around, and you're confident that you got a good computer for a good price. But now you're sitting and staring at one or more very large cardboard boxes and wondering what to do next.



If this were a TV we were talking about, you'd know what to do. Hook up the cable, plug it in and turn it on. But a computer is a little more complex, and probably a good deal more expensive than the last TV you bought. You need to spend a little more time and effort to make sure you got what you paid for. If it's not right, you want to know right away, when you still have some leverage with the dealer or manufacturer.

You also want to take some precautions so that if *you* ever mess up, you can return your computer to its original operating condition. So here are some tips on how to spend your first day with your new computer.

Externals

First, you want to make sure the computer isn't damaged.

Start out by looking closely at the boxes before you even leave the store (or before the delivery guy leaves, if you bought through mail order). Although some dings and scuffs on the box are unavoidable (that's why they put this stuff in boxes to begin with), you should avoid a box with major dents, holes or tears. Also, make sure the box is sealed with the original packing tape. Boxes that have been opened and resealed may be missing parts or may have been returned by an unsatisfied customer. It's not unheard of for returned "lemons" to find their way back onto the shelf at full price.

Once you open the box, you must avoid the temptation to treat your PC like a television. The urge to plug in and start playing is strong, but you must resist. Start out by making sure that you got all the manuals and documentation. Then use the manual to inventory all the parts. Make sure you have all of the cables you need, and that small-but-necessary accessories like the mouse haven't escaped from the box in the packing and shipping process. Keep all of the boxes and packing materials for a while, since most stores and manufacturers require anything returned under warranty to be in the original container.

Take a look at the software bundle, too. You should have certificates of authenticity for major programs like Windows on PCs, and you should have original media (floppy disks or CD-ROMs) for *all* of the software that comes with your machine. You want to be able to to reinstall your software if anything goes wrong (like when your cybermunchkin accidentally reformats your hard drive). Some unscrupulous dealers load software on the computers they sell without buying the proper license from the software manufacturer. You may get the program, but you won't get any support from the

You should have original media (floppy disks or CD-ROMs) or ALL of the software that comes with your machine. You want to be able to to reinstall your software if anything goes wrong (like when your cybermunchkin ACCIDENTALLY reformats your hard drive).

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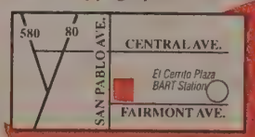

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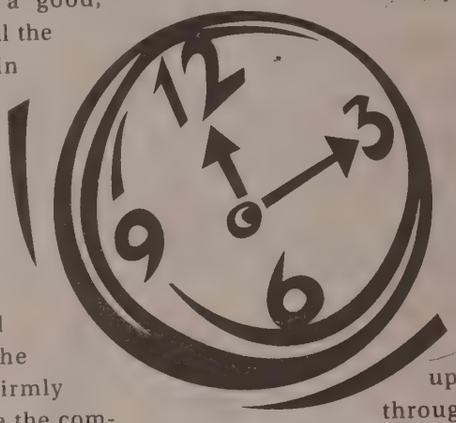
manufacturer, and you won't be able to buy less expensive "upgrade" versions in the future. You don't want to find out later that you paid full price for this bootleg software.



Next, take a good, close look at all the components in your system for signs of damage or poor construction. Look at the case for cracks, dents, or chips, and make sure the cover is firmly attached. Give the computer a gentle shake. Even a desktop machine should not rattle, and you don't want a loose screw or washer floating around inside waiting to short out delicate and expensive electronics. If you're the adventurous sort, you might even want to open the case and check that all of the various components are installed. The owner's manual should include a diagram of innards which shows where all the major components are.

This is also a good time to jot down vital statistics like the part number, serial number and manufacture date, which are often stamped in very inconvenient places on the case. You'll need these numbers if you ever have to call tech support.

Make sure that you use a surge protector on your power and phone lines. These inexpensive devices are a lot like seat belts—they're no good unless you use them every time.

Electrical

Once your gear has passed a physical inspection, it's time for the moment of truth—the bootup.

Setting up computers has never been easier, and can be done by most reasonably handy people in fifteen or twenty minutes. Do look at the instructions, though. Even with color-coded cables, specially shaped connectors and little pictograms, it *is* possible to screw up. And make sure that you use a surge protector on your power and phone lines. These inexpensive devices are a lot like seat belts—they're no good unless you use them every time.

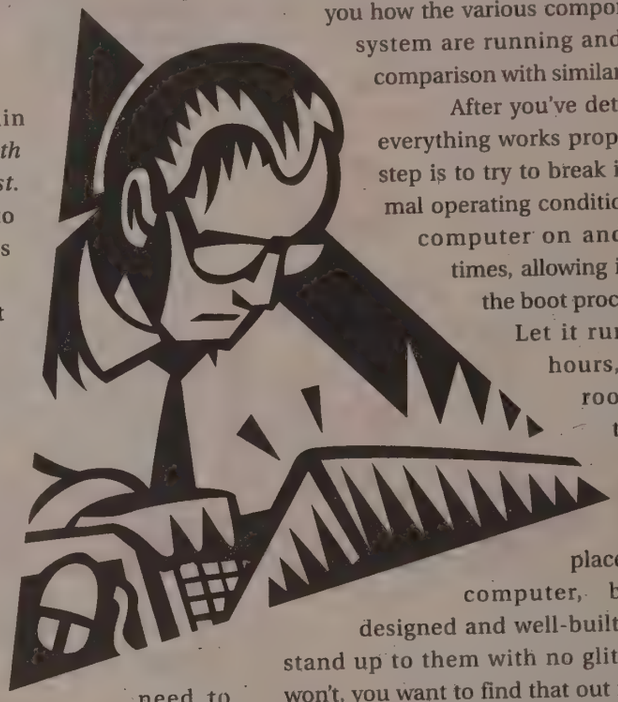
When you've double-checked all of the connections, you're ready to throw the switch (some find that reenacting the lab scene from *Frankenstein* as the screen flickers to life enhances this experience). The computer will start to emit a series of humming and whirring sounds at this point—this is normal. Sparks, squeals, unusual odors, and severe grinding noises are not. The first time you boot up, let the machine go through the entire boot process, just to make sure it will do it as advertised.

Electronics

At this point, it is again tempting to fire up *Eleventh Hour of Doom in the Myst.* But you still have work to do to make sure that this computer is a keeper.

Shut down and reboot the computer. This time, as it boots up, enter the BIOS setup program (the particular keystrokes to do this vary—check your manual. If you have a Macintosh, you don't need to worry about this.) Write down all of the original BIOS settings, but don't make any changes. If you really screw up your system, these original settings will help you to start from scratch. The setup screens should also tell you what kind of drives are installed, how much RAM you've got, and other particulars of your computer. Compare what BIOS says you have to what you think you bought.

After completing your second bootup, create a boot or startup disk on a floppy (check your operating system manual to find out how to do this). You'll also want to put backup copies of some critical files like autoexec.bat, config.sys, io.sys, and msdos.sys on a floppy disk; on a Macintosh, back up all System disks. In Windows 95, you'll want copies of system.dat and user.dat. These files get altered by various applications, and may become corrupted over time. Having backup copies may allow you or a computer technician to restore your system after a major crash.

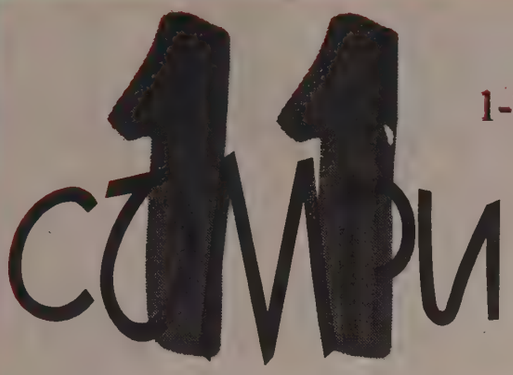


Now is also the time to make sure all of the various components work properly. Make sure that the floppy drive reads and writes, and that you can access the CD-ROM drive. If you have a printer hooked up, try printing something simple. Make a modem call, just to make sure it will dial. On Windows machines, you can also run a benchmark program like WINTUNE, available online from *Windows Magazine*. This will tell you how the various components of your system are running and gives you a comparison with similar systems.

After you've determined that everything works properly, the next step is to try to break it (under normal operating conditions). Turn the computer on and off several times, allowing it to complete the boot process each time. Let it run for several hours, keeping the room warmer than normal. Both of these tests place stress on the computer, but a well-designed and well-built machine will stand up to them with no glitches. If yours won't, you want to find that out now, while you can still put it back in the box and get it replaced or get your money back.

Software

Once you've determined that your hardware and operating system are working properly, you're ready to start checking out the software that came with it. Many computers come with dozens of programs and you could easily spend weeks checking all of the features and capabilities of all of them. But before you decide for sure whether your computer is a keeper, fire up and check out the preloaded applications that are most important to you. Make sure that they work by themselves, and that functions like



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While you're testing, look out for "foreign" files on your hard drive. If your word processing program has a letter to someone else's grandmother in the documents directory, or your address book is already full of people you don't know, you may have a "recycled" computer or hard drive. Either way, you've bought someone else's problem, and you should return the computer for a replacement.

Once you've decided that your computer is a keeper, do complete the warranty cards and register your software. It puts you on the mailing list for special offers, upgrades and patches, and will make it easier to get technical support in the future.

After you've checked out the preloaded software, you're ready to load any additional software you've bought. Methods of installing software vary widely, and are different for different operating systems, so it's important to read the instructions. If you have a "utilities" program like Norton Utilities or First Aid, you should install it first. These programs "watch" as you install the rest of your software, and may prevent some software conflicts or problems. Before you go online, you should also install a good virus protection package.

Like any job, this one isn't finished until the paperwork is done. Gather up all of your warranty and registration cards. You might actually want to wait for a week or two before sending them in, just in case you end up returning your computer after all. If you take it back to the store or send it back to the mail-order house, they usually prefer that you haven't registered anything. But once you've decided that your computer is a keeper, complete the warranty cards and register your software. It puts you on the mailing list for special offers, upgrades and patches, and will make it easier to get technical support in the future.

For all their "plug-and-play" and "out-of-the-box" boasts, computer manufacturers are still building very complex devices which need a delicate balance of hardware and software to work properly. And while most manufacturers and stores work very hard at quality control, they never will be perfect. If you spend a little time on the first day to make sure you didn't get a lemon, you can save yourself a lot of time and frustration later on. ■

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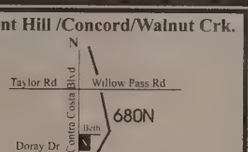

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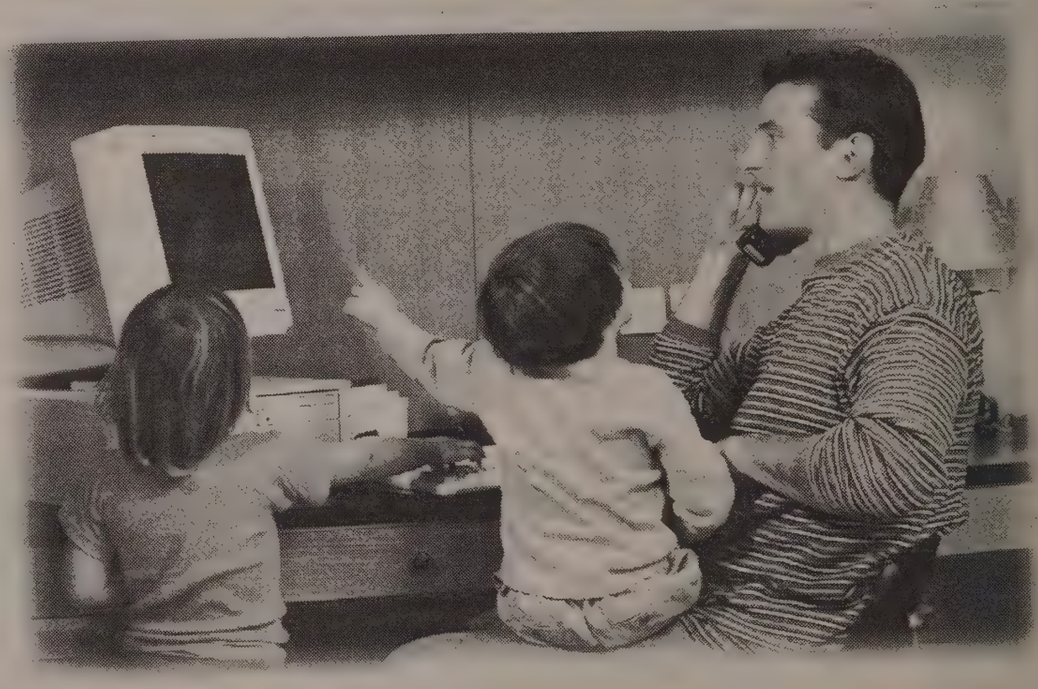
PARAMOUNT COMPUTER

The Online World And Your Family: What's In It For You?

Choosing Your Corner Of Cyberspace, And Getting The Most From It

By Laura Bell



Your kid's friends and everyone else in the neighborhood have jumped on the net. Your family is the only one left on the block who isn't net-savvy. You're thinking about taking the plunge, but you have questions.

What type of service do you want? Internet Service Providers (ISPs) are the companies that have all those ads in the computer section of the newspaper, offering low flat monthly rates. Your other options are joining a BBS (bulletin board service) or one of the information systems like CompuServe, Prodigy, or America Online. They in turn often offer gateways to the net.

Let's look at this one step at a time.

Getting Online Is Fun

The online world will provide you with in-house entertainment for family gatherings, help you with family management, give the kids a cost-efficient way to do homework (you don't have to drive them to the library!), and that's just for starters.

Perhaps the computer has either recently entered the family, or it may have been around for awhile. If your machine has a few years on it, get your feet wet first before deciding on newer equipment. The waters of the net can be surfed with older equipment, although at a lower speed. You also may miss out on some of

The ads for the Internet providers, CompuServe, Prodigy, and America Online, are everywhere. How much does it cost? What in the world is all this stuff anyway?

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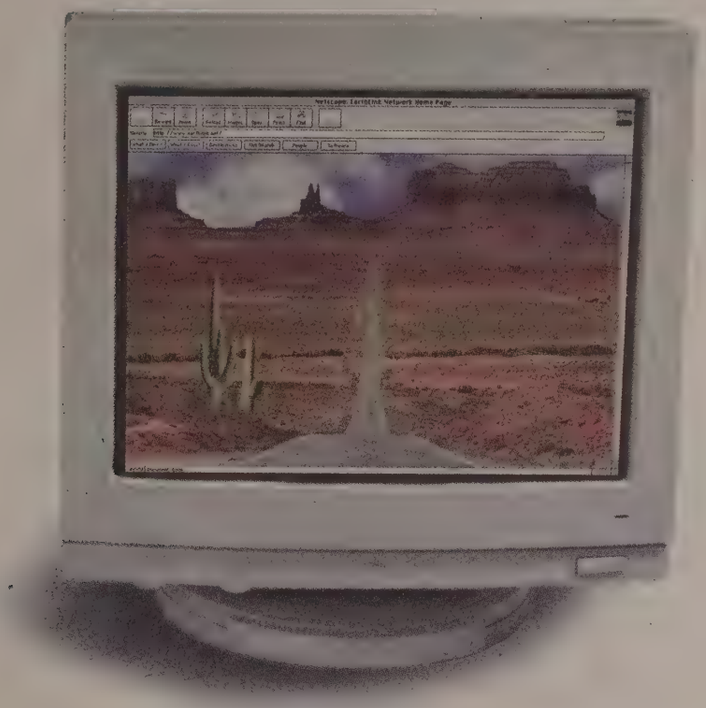

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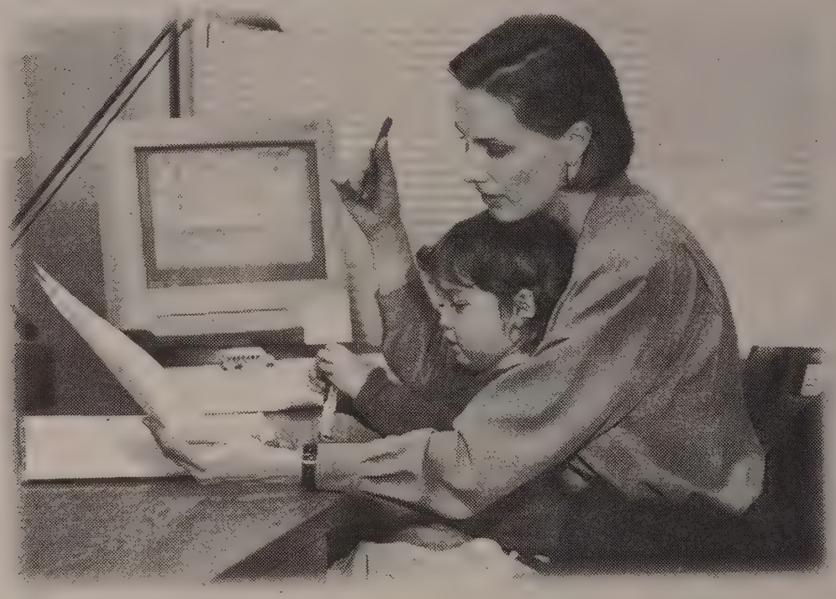
the graphics. But that's a decision for later; there are other issues to be addressed first.

Jumping online requires a modem, a dedicated phone line, telecommunications software, and if possible, a color monitor. The software may come with your computer, already installed on your hard drive, or you may choose to use the software offered by one of the information services.

possibly want? The problem is that's all you get—net time. No live chat, unless you have a tutorial from someone on how to use IRC (Internet Relay Chat). If you don't know how to use net offerings and have no online help to get you started, it's akin to walking into one big auditorium loaded from floor to ceiling with books when you have to research a paper due in three days.

Whether BBS, information service, or ISP, test out a few providers before choosing. It will not take you long before you find out what you feel comfortable with.

Services like CompuServe and AOL provide toll-free customer service lines, "feedback" email, and sometimes designated areas where tech support folks will field questions in assigned chat rooms. BBSes, on the other hand,



In preparation, watch some demonstrations of online services, perhaps at local computer shows, and join a computer users group. Ask around—get advice from your friends and your kids' friends.

Where To Start

The ads for the Internet providers, CompuServe, Prodigy, and America Online, are everywhere. How much does it cost? What in the world is all this stuff anyway?

The answer is threefold:

a) You are going to go one step at a time;

b) Nobody understands it all;

c) Costs vary, but can be controlled.

With that in mind, let's do a little homework. In preparation, watch some demonstrations of online services, perhaps at local computer shows, and join a computer users group. Ask around—get advice from your friends and your kids' friends. Consider it an intergenerational bonding experience.

Now you're ready to start.

Cost is usually a big concern. Sticker shock can be avoided initially by either choosing a local BBS with net services or using one of several ongoing offers from Prodigy, CompuServe, or America Online for 30 free days. (Some BBSes are free and others require fees, usually fairly modest.)

What about all those ads which offer you flat rates for all the Internet time your family could

For this reason, it's easier for the beginner to start by using a gateway/ entrance (a BBS or online service) whose walls are lined with maps, indices, and catalogues. One advantage of a BBS is that technical support can be as close as a "page" to someone online if you don't understand something. Most BBSes have demos/trial accounts.

Those ISP flat fees look very enticing, but the learning curve is often steep. When you become more familiar with how to use the net, you might find those flat-rate services a better fit for your changing needs.

Don't be afraid to ask advice from more knowledgeable friends when you're shopping for an Internet provider. These days new users are piling onto the Internet, often faster than the infrastructure can handle them.

Local ISPs charge low rates to build a customer base, and it's not unheard of for growing pains to result: equipment failure, constantly busy lines, and the feeling that their tech support has been lost permanently in cyberspace. The online system probably doesn't exist that hasn't gone through this at one time or another, but you'd do well to ask your friends about their likes and dislikes among the services they use.

have customer service lines which are not always covered adequately. But there is email/customer feedback available.

When it comes to the family budget, keep one thing in mind: services that charge by the hour love gaming segments on their boards for one reason—they keep people online. It's an easy way to run up your bill. You might try placing an old-fashioned kitchen timer next to the computer when a family member is involved with online game playing.

Also, a critical issue is whether the phone number you use to access the service is a local call. Most online services and ISPs offer local dialup lines; many BBSes don't. Remember that just because access to a BBS is free, it doesn't necessarily mean that the phone call is also free. Before you spend all those happy hours online, find out what it's costing you.

Understanding The Internet

Recently a net neophyte was watching my net surfing and asked, "Were we in the Internet?"

Sometimes new users (and even more experienced ones) don't understand the basics of the services and groups offered on the net. These include: Web pages and their search

continued on page 40

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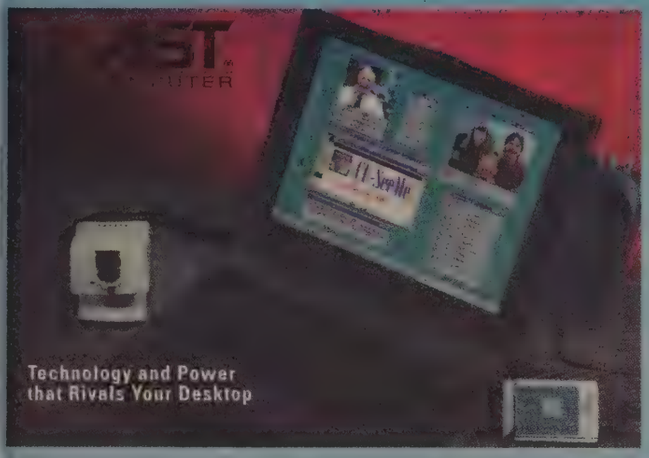

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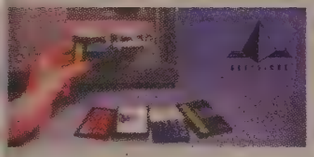

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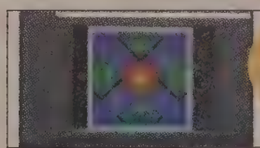

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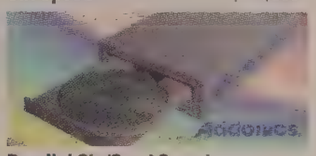

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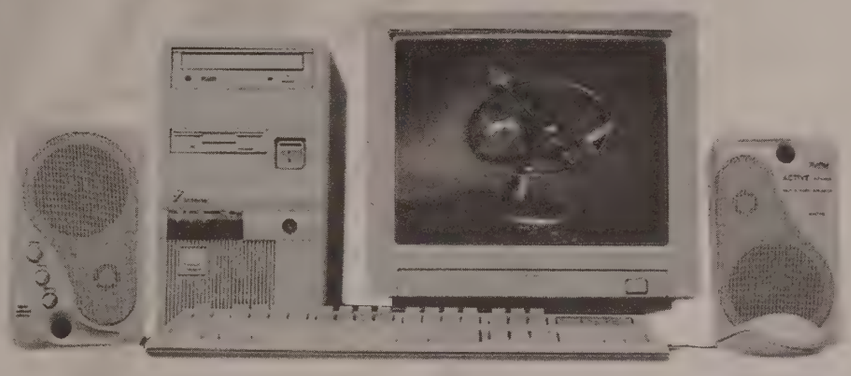

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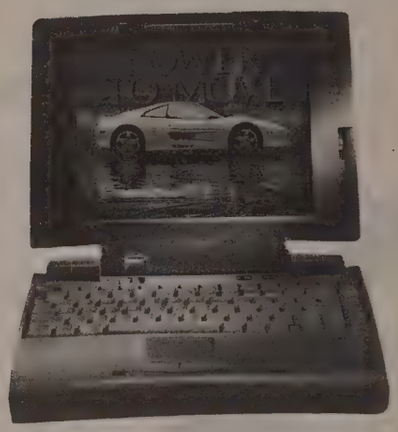

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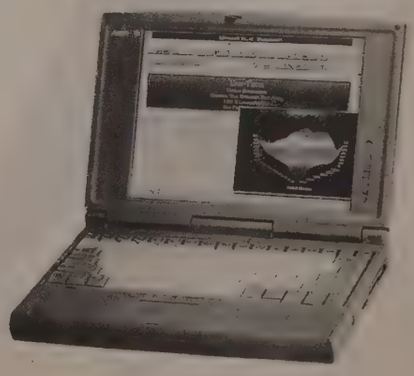

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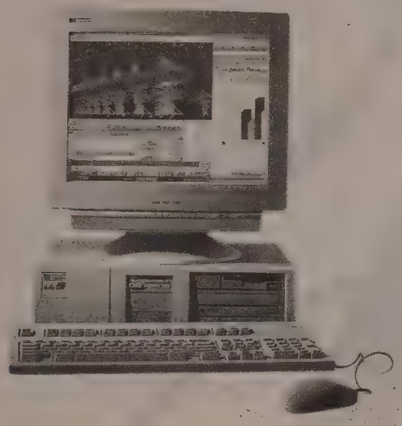

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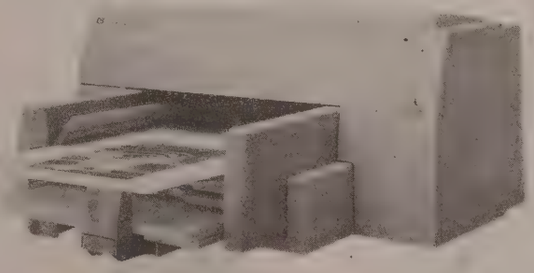

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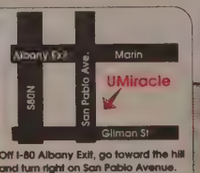

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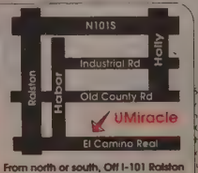

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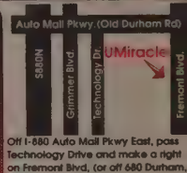

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P6

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...Vice President

TREEHOUSE SOFTWARE CONSULTING GROUP

July 25, 1996

Tony Nguyen
Sales Representative
UMiracle Microsystems, Inc.
44063 Fremont Blvd.
Fremont, CA 94538

Tony,

I just wanted to drop you a note of appreciation for your work in delivering our 3 SuperMicro Dual P6 Pro computers. The computers are great! They run Windows NT flawlessly. Installation was a breeze because UMiracle made sure that the computers shipped with all the proper drivers for Windows NT 3.51. Everyone who visits us is green with envy, and we have passed your company's name along with our highest recommendations.

Thanks once again.

Jeff Stock
Sr. Partner
Treehouse Software Consulting Group

2278 Berkeley Way ✉ Santa Cruz, CA 95062 ☎ (408) 427-2062

TYAN Dual P6 Pro

P6²

- TYAN Titan Pro AT S1662 Dual Pentium Pro PCI-ISA motherboard, dual CPU cooling fans, Intel Natoma 440FX Chipset, support Dual 150-200Mhz, 3 ISA+5 PCI slots, onbrd PCI Bus-Master IDE interfaces, HiSpd I/O, FD, Dual ZIF Socket 8, 2 VRM modules for future CPU support, Flash AMI PnP BIOS, FD/ECC 72Pin SIMM 4 way interleaved upto 1GB
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P6⁴

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- Toshiba MX-5602 EightSpeed IDE 1200KB/S CD-ROM
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Optional:
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  - *8/16/32/64MB x36 Error Checking & Correction (ECC) 72Pin Simm ... $Call*
  - *8/16/32/64MB Synchronous Dynamic RAM (SDRAM) 168Pin Simm .... $Call*
- **RAID Fast Wide SCSI-2 Controller ..... $Call**
  (for ideal RAID implementation, an IDE HD should be used as boot drive)
  - *DPT SmartCache IV SCSI Adapter & RAID Series/SmartRAID IV RAID Series*
  - *Mylex DAC960SI SCSI-to-SCSI RAID Controller*
    DAC960PD Hi-Performance PCI RAID Controller
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- **CD-ROM Tower Subsystem Chassis.....$Call**
  - *7 Plextor 8xi TXL-PX83CS w/250W PS*

T-101 *T-103*

* *Compatiblity with the latest NT 4.0 may not be guaranteed as most manufacturers are still working on the newest drivers for NT 4.0.*

Compatibility Guaranteed
Call for latest compatibility list for NT 3.51

Windows NT*

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(The Online World And Your Family continued from page 32)

machines, gophers, databases and search machines for FTP (file transfer protocol) sites, telnet (the ability to get to someone else's system from where you are), IRC (Internet chat), Usenet groups (message boards or forums), and BBS and ISP features, separates the Usenet groups from the other offerings. CompuServe, as another example, has its very own unique way of putting together the Usenet groups—once you tell the system you want to read messages in one particular group, it arranges the messages alphabetically by message topic. And then, if you are using a GUI (graphics user interface—usually the point-and-click variety), things can look entirely different than if you are using a DOS-based system with a regular telecom program.

If you don't know how to use net offerings and have no online help to get you started, it's akin to walking into one big auditorium loaded from floor to ceiling with books when you have to research a paper due in three days.

In short: everything is the same, and simultaneously different.

net mail (which sometimes is at the same spot the rest of your mail is). Access one of these areas, and you are on the net, in some form.

Every service, whether an ISP, a BBS or information service (CompuServe, et al); offers most or all of these services. However, each of them presents these resources differently. One service may put them all in a menu together; others such as the Well, a Bay Area system with both

Learn how to use one part of the net at a time. This way, later on, you will understand how each segment works, even if it appears in a different way on another system.

Now, to the fun stuff.

What's Online: Games, Entertainment, Services, Conversation

Before the net became popular and the "geeky" among us were the only ones having online fun, the major activities were: finding shareware, chatting, playing online games, and email.

Email is available everywhere in the online world. It is the one universal product. It is also the one place most folks start when getting online.

In the old days, email was only usable for the system you were logged into, for the most part. (If you want to know more, look up the history of FidoNet.) Email now can be sent from service to service through the net. The only requirement is for you to be online and to know the receiver's email address. Depending on how many times a day your server sends out its mail,

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SPECIAL OFFER: If you purchase Windows NT 3.51 after July 1996 you will receive the new Windows NT version 4.0 directly from Microsoft at no additional cost.

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- MS Mouse & 104 Keytronic K/B
- 15" CTX .28 NI, 1024x768 Monitor

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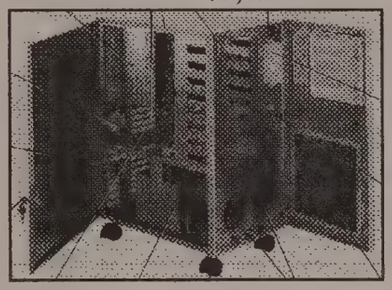

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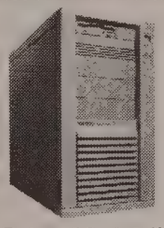

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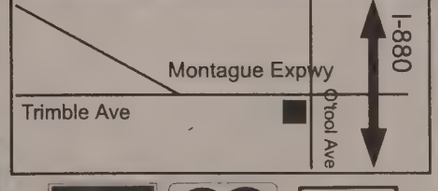

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Computer games have always been great fun and a family get-together time. There are games for all online world participants.

On the Internet proper, there are newsgroups which discuss gaming activities; online gatherings of the fans of specific types of games; interactive role-playing types in rooms called MUDs (Multi-User Dungeons, which require some net expertise).

Many shareware gaming companies now have FTP sites from which you can download their products. Once you get a copy of their original, check the included "read" file for FTP sites for additions and updates. Web pages are also now hosting gaming sites. Try *http://www.zone.com* —this hosts traditional chess, other board games and various card games. You can read the introduction via a text-based browser, but Netscape or another GUI is needed to play.

Remember that just because ACCESS to a BBS is FREE, it DOESN'T necessarily mean that the phone call is also FREE. Before you spend all those happy hours online, find out what it's costing you.

Another great benefit of belonging to an information service is that instead of having to hunt out specific net sites, you can sit back and let the service do it for you. A recent opening menu on CompuServe urged visitors to go to a spot and get a list of "cool" game links.

BBSes and the information services house a great variety of gaming adventures. BBSes have online role-playing games which involve teams. *War of the Worlds* is a very popular offering of this gaming niche. All sorts of versions and modifications to one of the oldest role-playing game—*Dungeons and Dragons*— are online.

A few gaming companies with online sites are the makers of *Doom*, as well as Lucas Games, Apogee, Infocom, Sierra, and Activision.

There are also message boards for "gamers" on the information services. So, if you are stuck for a clue, post a message. Usually within a very short period of time you'll get an answer. (Usenet also houses similar offerings.)

Gaming is only part of the entertainment offerings available through your modem. Movie industry news, book reviews, CD-ROM offerings, sports headlines and fantasy sport games are just a few. Also, news of sporting events and scores usually break before regular traditional news headlines.

The online world is a ton of fun! Jump in and enjoy what you have been missing. There will always be something new to learn. ■

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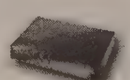
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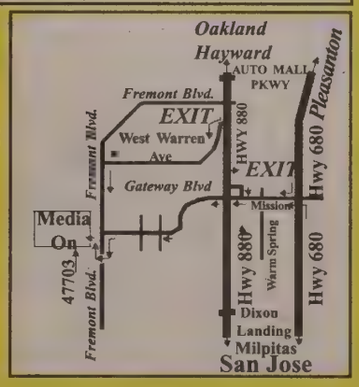

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Planning Your Home Office

Or, Know Thyself: Words To Live By

By Birrell Walsh

If you haven't read Mike Markowitz's excellent article "So You Wanna Buy a Computer" in this issue, I recommend you start there. What I have to say as a ten-year home office veteran builds on his very sage advice.

Know Thyself

These words, written above the entrance to the Delphic Oracle in Greece, say much to someone who is building a personal office for the first time. Anything you learn about your own needs will save you money in the marketplace.

The better you know your own needs as a worker, the better you can design your own home-working environment. Knowing what kind of person you are helps you to choose the machinery and working styles that fit you best.

A person who needs the newest and flashiest in their life will not be happy with old hardware or software. A person who likes what is reliable may prefer something that is tested and broken in. Some people need others to set deadlines; others would be insulted by the "interference." One person may treasure a fully isolated home office; another may need a desk in the middle of the household traffic. Knowing these things about yourself will allow you to be effective when working at home.

Tried & True, Or Shiny & New?

The kind of car you are comfortable with will tell you a lot about the sort of home office computer you probably need.

The kindly people who run computer stores, of course, are happy to sell you the latest equipment. They want you to buy the FlatOut Deadrun Megasaurus. But you may or may not need all this lovely power.

So take some time to examine your own preferences before you hit the stores, and you are much more likely to come home with an office package you like.

As a reviewer of computer products, I must be able to accommodate the newest and the biggest of packages that my readers are likely to use. I therefore hotrod around one end of the computer spectrum. I feel I must have a machine that runs at least 120 megahertz, and a graphics board that can keep pace with that.

But if you are really sure that you only want to do word processing, you don't need all this. I know a family that includes as its breadwinners a working lawyer and a national television news anchor. At work they have very current machines. At home all they do is word processing. They get along just fine with a very archaic machine running WordPerfect under DOS.

Even though Microsoft has gone on to Windows 3.1 and now Windows 95, many home office users are still functioning just fine with a DOS system. One such user, the dapper and articulate Richard Steckler, has made a sport of getting good performance for very little money. I asked him how he did it, and he replied:

"If you have an IBM-XT like me, making do with DOS without color or pictures is a necessity...it is easily done (painless too), especially if you conclude that the mouse actually slows down the neat way of handling files and directories that various shareware programmers offer.

"My personal favorite is 'Directory Freedom' by Gordon Haff, which is everything Dosshell should have been...intuitive and fast. Couple that with Vernon Buerg's 'List,' which is unbeatable for finding words within files, and you have the start of a fast, efficient file management system.

"Unless you take pleasure in desktop publishing, use the simplest word processor that will allow that letter to Uncle Harry to be typed and printed... Get a used dot matrix printer that you have software to drive and, friend, you are in business. Don't throw away that 2400 baud modem...it is the equal of the latest 33K modem on the Internet Relay Chat. Just brew a cup of tea while it downloads that huge DOS shareware program you want—say, 40KB.... "

Richard adds that the DOS shareware programs he mentions are available as *list77a.zip* and *df460.zip* at *http://oak.oakland.edu/simtel.net/* .

Using machines that are this old requires the same humor and resourcefulness that classic-car owners possess. If that is not your style, but you still want to save money, consider taking in a retired computer. This is a machine that is two or three years old, probably being retired by an office (or some snob like me) because it is no longer the newest and the best. But it is still very serviceable.

For instance, many 386 and 486 computers running Windows 3.1 have years of useful life left. They may be loaded with formerly standard software that is quite serviceable, but now a couple of versions out of date. I just retired a perfectly useful 386 33 MHz computer with Microsoft Word version 2. I could not possibly type fast enough to outpace that machine. Everything about it was good for me until it was retired. For many people it is more than enough.

There are three qualifications if you're getting an older machine: get a new hard disk, modem, and scanner.

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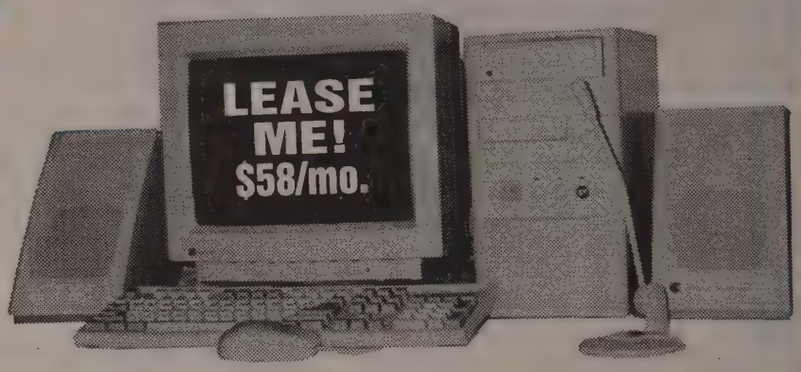

P5/133 COFAX15V

- **Intel 133 MHz Pentium processor**
- **Intel Triton chipset**, Socket 7
- 256K Pipeline burst cache, Plug & Play
- **16 MB RAM EDO**
- **1.6 GB (1600 MB) Hard Drive**
- 1.44 (3.5") Floppy Drive
- **SVGA Monitor 15" .28 NI**
- 2 MB SVGA MPEG Video Card with S3 Trio 64V+ Graphics Accelerator
- **8X CD-ROM**
- Sound Blaster 16 PNP
- Surround Sound 170 W Speakers
- **33.6 K Voice FAX Modem**
- Mid-tower Model
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- Microphone
- *MS Windows 95*
- *Compton's Encyclopedia 1996*
- *MS Works, 250 Games*

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$1895 with 17" Monitor

P5/150 COFAX32V

- **Intel 150MHz Pentium processor**
- Intel Triton chipset, Socket 7
- 512K Pipeline burst cache, Plug & Play
- **32 MB RAM EDO**
- **2.1 GB (2100 MB) Hard Drive**
- 1.44 (3.5") Floppy Drive
- **SVGA Monitor 15" .28 NI**
- 2 MB SVGA MPEG Video Card with S3 Trio 64V+ Graphics Accelerator
- **8X CD-ROM**
- Sound Blaster 16 PNP
- Surround Sound 170 W Speakers
- **33.6 K Voice FAX Modem**
- Mid-tower Deluxe Model
- 104+ Windows 95 Keyboard & mouse
- Microphone
- *MS Windows 95*
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- *MS Works, 250 Games*

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$2245 with 17" Monitor

P5/166 COFAX17V

- **Intel 166 MHz Pentium processor**
- **Intel Triton chipset**, Socket 7
- 256K Pipeline burst cache, Plug & Play
- **16 MB RAM EDO**
- **2.1 GB (2100 MB) Hard Drive**
- 1.44 (3.5") Floppy Drive
- **SVGA Monitor 17" .26 NI**
- 2 MB SVGA MPEG Video Card with S3 Trio 64V+ Graphics Accelerator
- **8X CD-ROM**
- Sound Blaster 16 PNP
- Surround Sound 170 W Speakers
- **33.6 K Voice FAX Modem**
- Mid-tower Model
- 104+ Windows 95 Keyboard & mouse
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- Sound Blaster 16 PNP
- Surround Sound 170 W Speakers
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- 256K Pipeline burst cache
- **32 MB RAM EDO**
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- **SVGA Monitor 17" .26 NI**
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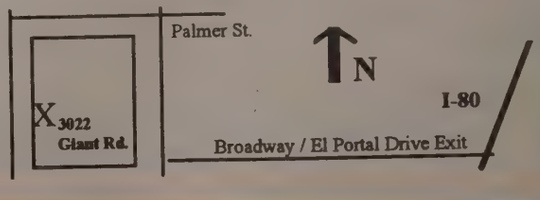

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- 8MB Memory
- Teac 1.44MB Floppy Drive
- 1GB IDE Hard Drive
- PCI Enhanced IDE/IO Controller Card
- Diamond Stealth 64 w/1MB DRAM
- 15" NI .28dp Monitor
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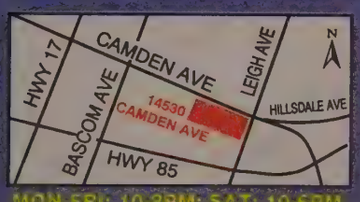

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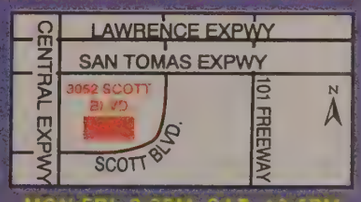

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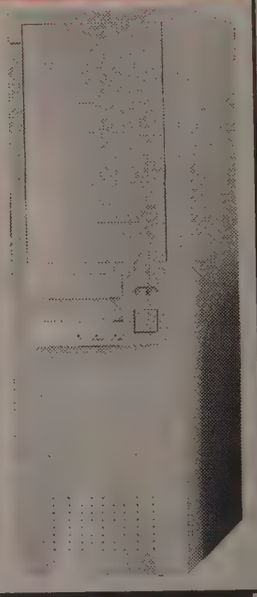

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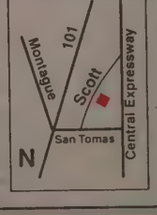

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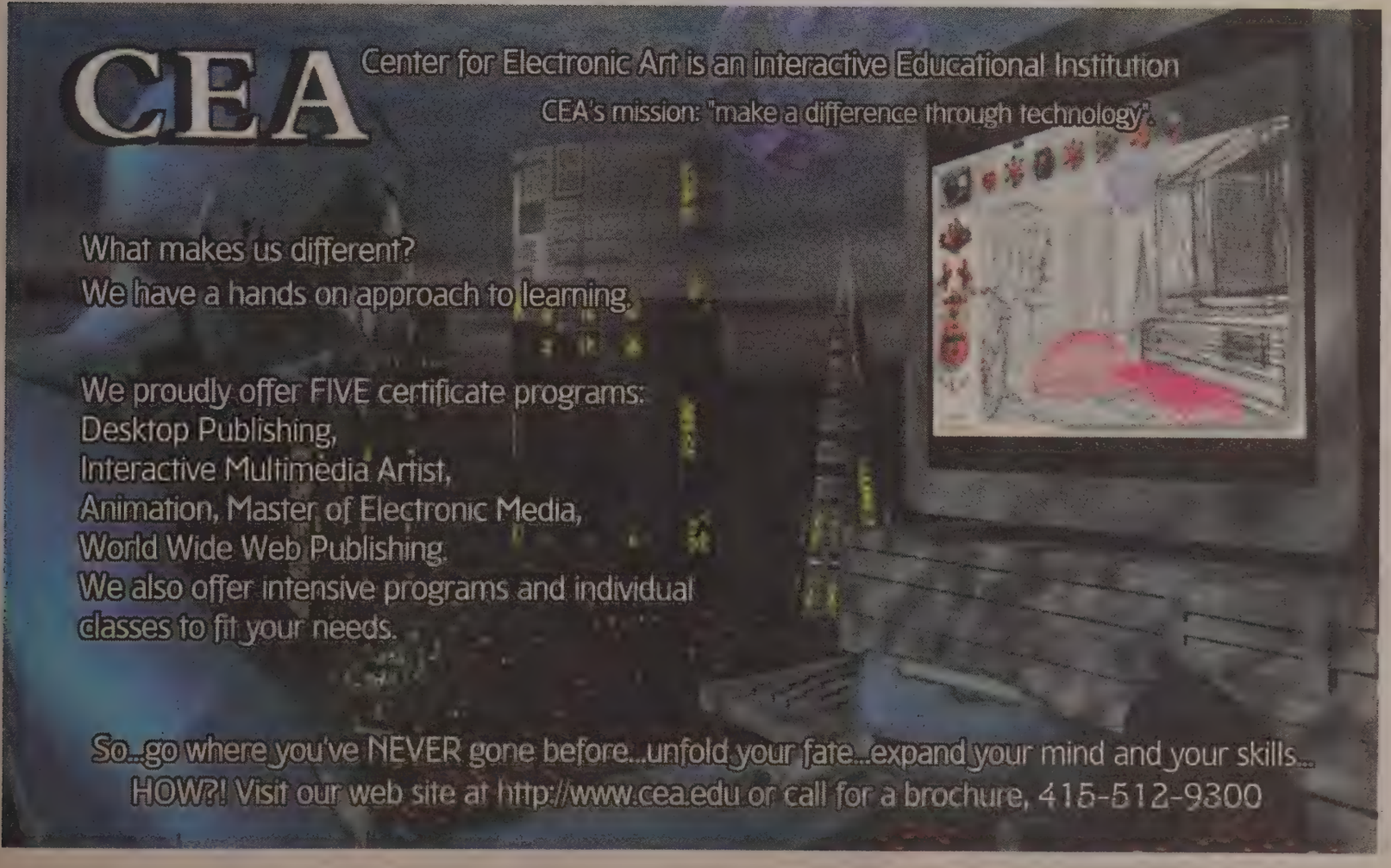
(Planning Your Home Office continued from page 46)

If you buy a machine with a hard disk that is several years old, may I suggest you get a new hard disk that is at least one gigabyte in size and use the older disk solely for backup? You do not want to depend on an aging disk drive to take care of mission-critical data. And you will want a larger disk drive for the many graphic and sound files you will be getting over the Internet.

This brings up the second qualification: you need the latest in modems (a minimum of 28.8 kbps at this writing) to function well on the Internet. Other parts of the computer may have been underused, but modems are hard-put to keep up with our demands. Huge download files can cost us hours of connect time if we have a slow modem. Images can arrive so slowly that we give up the Web in frustration.

The other thing you really need to add to an older machine is a scanner and fax board. Most good modems these days include fax send-and-receive, obviating the ubiquitous fax machines of yore. To scan in things you have not generated on your own computer, you need a scanner. They can cost a fortune, but I have settled on the cheap and reliable Visioneer Paperport

A home office is a strange mixture of isolation and company. You are isolated from the supports and helpful structures of a formal workplace, and you are exposed to every demand of home.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(800/787-7007). It comes with a simple system which can convert print to text (OCR) as well as scan in pictures.

If you do buy a used computer, I would recommend that you upgrade it to have all these capabilities immediately.

Disaster Relief

The day before an article is due, the monitor goes "ZzziSSt" and is no more. If you are a patient person who tolerates misfires well, I bow to you. I am not. I get enraged when the flow of my work is interrupted, and it has happened several times. If you are like me, you may want to pay extra for extra support.

I recently bought a monitor from a national chain store. I chose them because they offered a particularly attractive support plan. For seventy dollars, they offered three years of on-site, next-business-day care for the monitor.

There is nothing as devastating to a small business as a crashed computer. It could be any part—hard disk, monitor or motherboard—but it puts you out of business until it is replaced. You may suddenly discover that the manufacturer's warranty on your product really means the following:

"You will bring your broken part, not to the store where you bought it, but to our support center in South Woodchuck. We'll put it in a box and about Thursday we'll send it off to the manufacturer. They'll get to it on Shrove Tuesday and if they have all the parts they'll have it back in time for the kids' graduation. Unless the cat has walked on the computer: That voids the warranty." At this point you use strong language to everyone and stomp out of the store with your broken computer and nowhere to go. You can be out of business for weeks.

Some stores will provide loaner monitors. But I want my own machine, working right now, and to me support packages are worth the extra money I pay for them. If the company offering the support will give you right-now service with no hassles, it is easily worth ten or even twenty percent more. It can put you back in business the next day.

Creative Conversation Or The Joys Of Solitude?

"An artist is always alone," said Henry Miller, "What the artist needs is *loneliness*." But Ecclesiastes replies, "Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labor."

A home office is a strange mixture of isolation and company. You are isolated from the supports and helpful structures of a formal workplace, and you are exposed to every demand of home. You must *really* know yourself to deal with the issues of company and isolation in a home office.

Among those issues:

- Do you need human contact to recharge yourself?
- Do you need others to enforce deadlines?
- Can you keep the children (or the pets or the neighbors) out of your workspace long enough to get anything done?

First, you need to know if you are an introvert or an extrovert. I am told the test is this: when you are tired, do you recharge by being alone or by seeking company? If you seek others, you are an extrovert; if you seek solitude, you are an introvert. This distinction has immediate application to the home-office worker. The introvert, who finds others draining, is well suited to working alone at home. The extrovert may need to design in human contact.

Second, who structures your time? Some of us are used to other people making demands, and we organize our days by responding to them. Other workers may prefer to organize their own time and set their own

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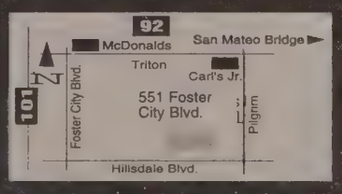

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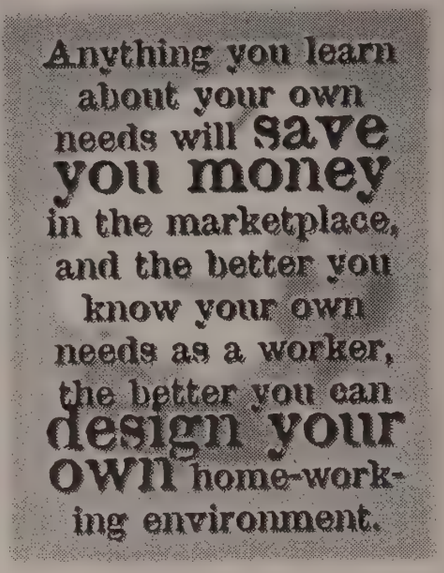
schedules. There is no right answer to this question, but it is really useful to know the true answer. I would get no writing done if it were not for deadlines others set, and my editor (unbeknownst to her) has been my writing-conscience for years. If you are like me, you need to find someone outside your office who will serve as a deadline-setter and enforcer.


Anything you learn about your own needs will save you money in the marketplace, and the better you know your own needs as a worker, the better you can design your own home-working environment.

Third, can you create a space and time at home that is dedicated to work and cannot be violated? People who would not bother you at work feel no compunction about dropping in for coffee when you are trying to get the report out. The point is not to sic the Chihuahua on them; the trick is to create signals that tell people when you are and aren't available.

A private, work-only room is best. It will also make it possible to deduct part of your home on your taxes—no small benefit. A dedicated set of hours when you are off-limits is also a possibility. But if you cannot create these, find a way to signal to all that you *are* at work and are not available. It might be a closed door or even a flag. In our house, a word-processor on the screen means business is being done. If you want others to respect those boundaries, you must snarl convincingly when they are transgressed. If you are a non-snarler you can fake it. It is truly important to let others know the limits.

At the same time, make sure you can get some human contact regularly. My solution is to walk the dog once or twice a day. I meet the neighbors, get some exercise, and enjoy the company of a good companion. Twice a day I go online to pick up and answer email from friends worldwide. For a strong introvert like me, this works well. If you are an extrovert, you may *need* many phone calls or outside trips each day. You will need to find your own mix. Study the matter—the right balance will reward you richly.

Consider The Ecology

In a large office, it is some manager's job to optimize your working environment. When you work at home, you must handle this optimization yourself. You need to pay attention to whatever makes it easy and pleasant for you to work, and you must control anything that diminishes your productivity and happiness.

Think of yourself as a ranger of a nature preserve, pampering a rare species or as the manager of a superb and temperamental opera star. All the advice about choosing comfortable hardware and software and working styles are aspects of the same issue. When you are the proprietor of a home office, the one resource you *must* treat with respect and care is yourself. ■

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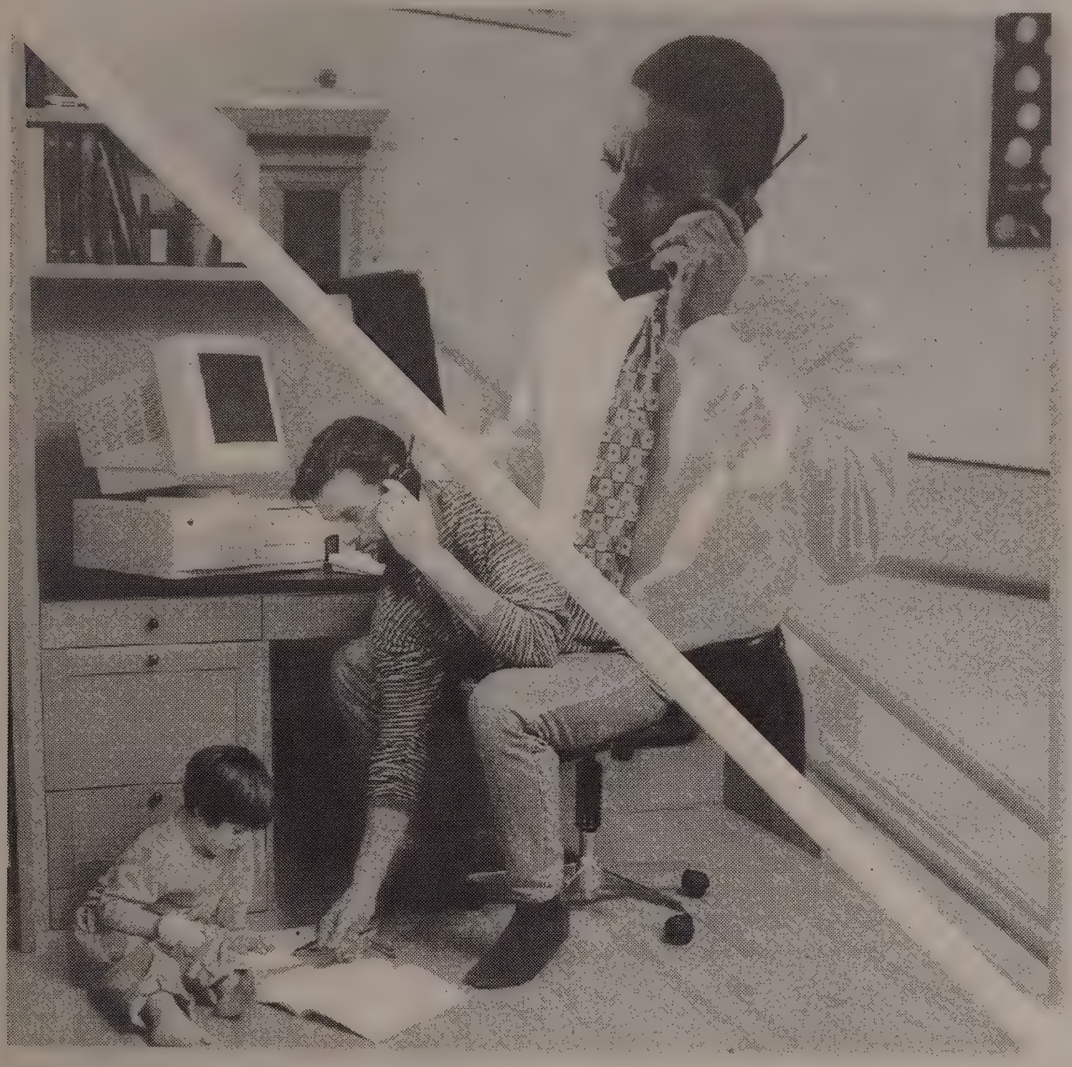


Telecommuting

What Is It? Is It For You?

By Robert Moskowitz

Is there anyone alive who hasn't heard of "telecommuting"? The art was originally conceived and practiced by iconoclasts and steadfastly practical professionals who insisted on the right to avoid that long commute into the office on days when they had a great deal to do—and do alone. Today, telecommuting is second only to "casual days" as the fastest-growing shift in traditional working patterns, and it's far more helpful than wearing sneakers and T-shirts for accomplishing more work in less time.

As you can imagine, telecommuting is broadly defined and includes any method for working productively outside the traditional office. Telecommuters include everyone from computer programmers in Denver reporting to an employer in Australia, to an executive who stays at home one morning to study a complex contract, to a data-entry clerk who works on a desktop in her spare bedroom, to a sales person who rarely leaves the territory in which he lives and works.

Already many large firms have their phones answered in Kansas or another remote location. They could just as easily have their graphics, advertising, market planning and analysis, and other information-intensive activities done by telecommuting workers equipped with advanced technology and supported by the "information highway."

Many people confuse telecommuting with telecomputing, or believe that telecommuting requires an awful lot of computer gear. Actually, you can telecommute with only paper, a pencil, and a telephone. And you can even leave out the telephone if all you're doing is reading and thinking.

But if computers and other equipment can help you be more productive in the office, then that same type of equipment can probably help you be more productive when telecommuting at home. Even better, the power of computers to send and receive all kinds of information can allow a telecommuter to remain very closely connected with those working in the office—an important advantage for many of today's information-intensive and group-oriented jobs.

In fact, as computer and communications devices become more portable and inexpensive, telecommuting has become cost-effective and viable enough to attract the attention of both large and small organizations.

Advantages

One of the most pleasant surprises about telecommuting is that it's a win-win-win situation for the individual telecommuter, the employer, and society as a whole.

The individual benefits from telecommuting because he or she immediately eliminates the time, trouble, and expense of physically commuting to work. This gives the average person an extra hour per day, right off the top, to use for the thinking, the writing, the telephoning, the planning, and the reporting work which keeps the business organization moving forward.

The benefits of telecommuting also translate directly and immediately into more discretionary time, more time with the family, less stress, and general health improvements.

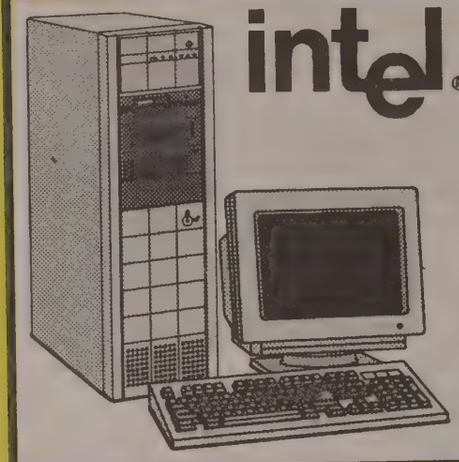
In addition, because you're working at home, you have more control over your time, more flexibility to take a short break and change a diaper or drive a child to a friend's house, more freedom to cook your family a nice meal, and less pressure to keep every minute crammed with useful activities.

Commuting costs are much lower for telecommuters, who tend to feel more in control of their life than employees who travel to the same (distant) office five days a week.

The family generally likes having Mommy or Daddy around for that extra hour each telecommuting work day, and presumably benefits from not getting dumped on by the physical commuter's unspent frustration accumulated during the trip home.

The employer benefits from telecommut-

continued on page 108



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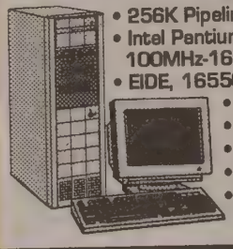

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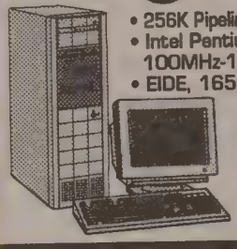

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- EIDE, 16550 UART I/O, 1 parallel port
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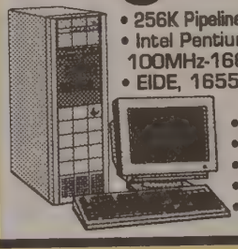

- 256K Pipeline Burst Cache
- Intel Pentium® processors, 100MHz-166MHz
- EIDE, 16550 UART I/O, 1 parallel port
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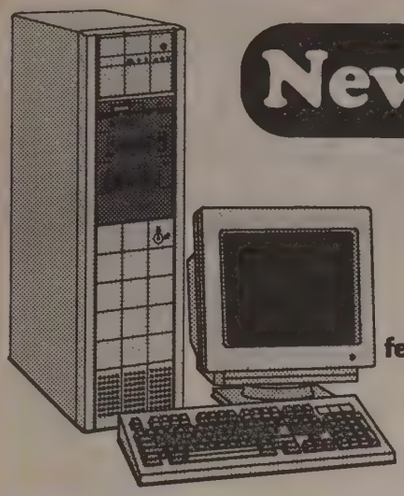

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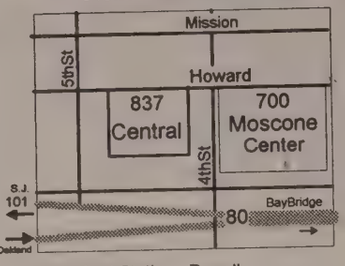

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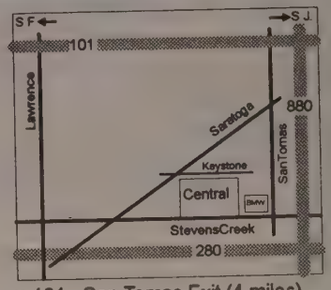

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Microsoft Serial Mouse
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Super P55CMS 586-100 / 133	$1535/$1625

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Western Digital 1.6GB EIDE Hard Drive
EIDE & I/O, 256k Pipeline Cache on board
Toshiba 8X CD Rom Drive
Mid Tower Case w. 250W Power
Mitsumi / Keytronic Keyboard
MAG DX1595 / Viewsonic 15ES Monitor
Microsoft Serial Mouse
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SP-880, 120W Speakers
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- Wave Blaster II 135

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NEC
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- MultiSpin 4X Ext 4 Disc Changer 339
- *MultiSpin 4X Int 4 CD Rom Changer ..... *(129)*

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- PX-83CS 110ms, 1200KB/s, 256k, 8X, SCSI 345

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- CSD-765B 4X SCSI Int 109
- PRD-150 Portable 2X w. PCMCIA Kit 345

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- Maestro CD-6 6X Parallel Ext 249
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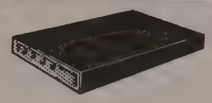

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- Sportster 28.8 Win Modem Int 119
- Sportster v.34 28.8/14.4 Fax for MAC 215
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Tips & Picks For Home Computing

We asked our writers, our colleagues, our friends and family members for their recommendations of products they find especially useful or outstanding, as well as for general advice. Here's what they had to say!

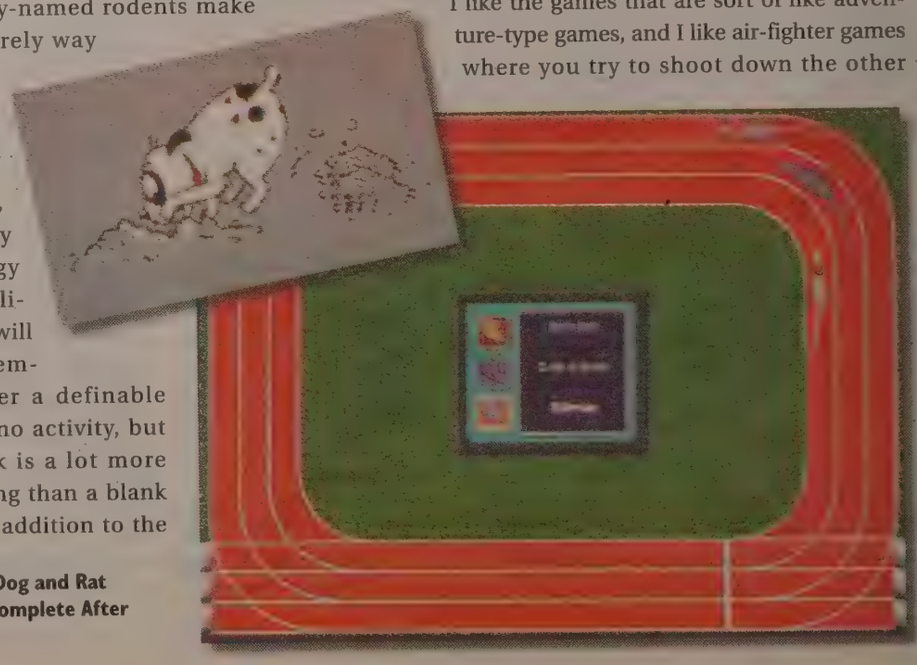
Best Game

Kevin Savetz: Without a doubt, the favorite game around these parts is You Don't Know Jack, X-Tra Large Edition, from Berkeley Systems. "Jack" is a sly, irreverent trivia game for adults. Modeled after a generic television game show, Jack offers oddball questions and twists that you won't find elsewhere—for instance, if you think another player doesn't know the answer to a question, you can buzz in and "screw your neighbor," forcing him to make a guess. Throw in hilarious sound effects and biting asides from the host, and you've got a great time for one to three players. You Don't Know Jack is available for Mac and Windows.

Mary Eisenhart: Screen savers aren't exactly games, but this one doesn't lack for entertainment value.

A couple of years ago, my dad got his first Macintosh, and since it didn't come with a screen saver, I bought him The Complete After Dark (Berkeley Systems) for Christmas. Not only has his monitor been saved from the perils of burn-in, countless hours have been wasted around the ancestral home just experimenting with the modules and watching the silly antics of the software. Particular favorites seem to be the Evel Knievel-like daredevil coming to grief in his attempts to leap multiple schoolbuses and flaming hoops; the all-too-true-to-life misdeeds of Bad Dog; and Rat Race, in which portly and hysterically-named rodents make their leisurely way around a track.

These days most monitors, particularly the Energy Star compliant ones, will dim themselves after a definable period of no activity, but After Dark is a lot more entertaining than a blank screen. In addition to the ever-popular Complete CD, you can choose from options from Disney to Star Trek, and Mac or Windows versions.



Right: Bad Dog and Rat Race, The Complete After Dark 3.0.

Jesse Barrett: I like playing games. Like right now, I'm playing PGA Golf Tour with my dad.

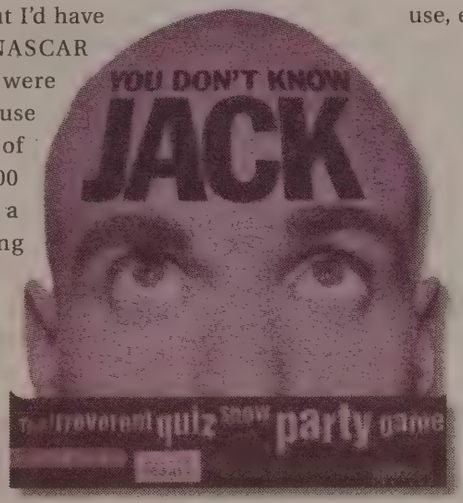
I like Tetris, and there's one game called Shufflepuck Café; it's like one of those air hockey sort of things, not hockey, but it looks like a hockey puck and you use little paddles to hit it with.

I like the games that are sort of like adventure-type games, and I like air-fighter games where you try to shoot down the other

machines that try to get you. My friend Kevin Dyer has one and I like that a lot.

Jason Boatman: I don't play any games on my computer—but if I had to recommend two games, they'd be Marathon (first-person perspective) and P.F. Magic's Dogz.

Cassidy Allen: About a year-and-a-half ago, I had the pleasure of staying with my brother-in-law, John, a network administrator by day, computer gaming slave by night. We spent many hours (much to both our wives' displeasure) gleefully pounding on the keyboard and testing the joystick's mettle on destructo-games such as Doom, but I'd have to say my favorite game was NASCAR Racing, not so much because we were stock car racing fanatics, but because we loved to drive against the flow of traffic, dodging the other cars at 200 mph and inevitably crashing in a shockwave of debris and churning smoke. The best part was watching the mayhem over and over in instant replay from several different angles. I don't think we ever finished a race, but the fun wasn't in winning, but in how ridiculously we played the game.



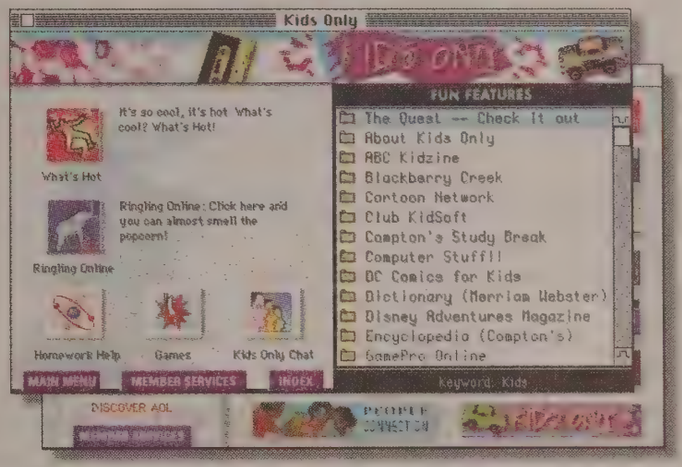
Best Online Service for Families

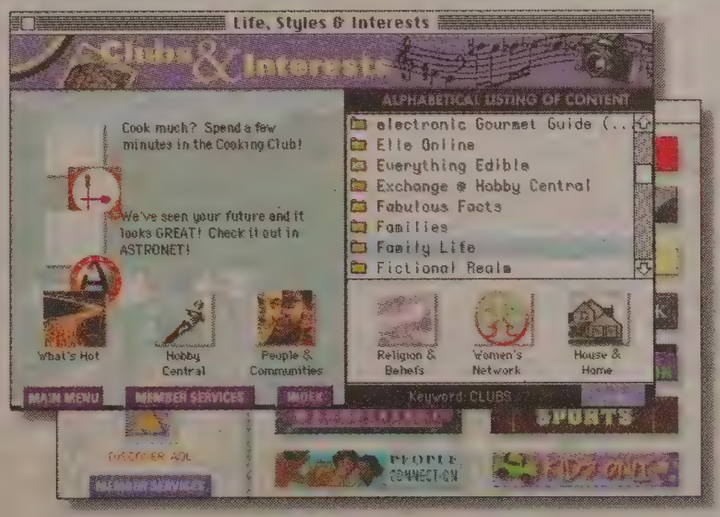
Jesse Barrett: If I could, I would spend a lot of time online. I like to go to Kids Only and Nickelodeon Online (on America Online) and, if my Mom lets me, I like to download a game to try it out. Sometimes I can't because I forget about time and go a little over-time—so I play my computer games too.

Kevin Savetz: I've tried them all, and my favorite online service for the family is America Online. Its breadth of content assures that it has something for everyone, and its ease-of-use will ensure that everyone will want to use it. AOL just fixed one of its biggest problems—the cost of heavy use—by introducing a $1 per hour access plan. AOL also offers Internet access, including the Web, email, and your own home page, for no extra charge.

Cassidy Allen: America Online—what else? Like you, I'm tired of receiving the installer disks that spray out of the AOL cornucopia like machine gun fire; I can't stand how every time I log on a dialog box appears saying "adding artwork; please wait;" and I've even had my account terminated without warning for no explainable reason.

But no one can match America Online's combination of services and ease-of-use. There's something for everyone on AOL, and whether you're a fan of *Mystery Science Theater 3000* or want to learn more about traveling the English Midlands, you'll bump into someone or someplace that shares your passion. And America Online is so easy to use, even my 10-year-old sister-in-law Erika can browse with no problem. If anything, AOL is an excellent Internet primer for the uninitiated.





Mary Eisenhart: In the long run, you'll probably want to get an Internet account from your local service provider, because monthly flat-rate pricing tends to be more budget-friendly than hourly rates.

That said, AOL delivers a range of offerings you'd still be hard-pressed to match out on the big net, and it has some of the most warm, human, supportive corners of cyberspace I've encountered in ten years online. For example, the Pets forum, where you can find out where to adopt a rescued Golden Retriever and where no one will berate you for grieving over the loss of a pet, and the Adoption forum, where adoptees, birth parents, and adoptive parents all look out for each other with enormous kindness.

There's lots to read, lots to download, and oodles of stuff to buy should you be so inclined, but the real strengths of the system are its ease-of-use and its support from the get-go of affinity-based communities.

Michael Robin: In the technology world, bashing America Online seems to be almost as popular as attacking Apple Computer. All the hype and criticisms aside, AOL continues to grow because there really is something there.

Not only is interface (i.e., ease-of-use) still important, but it's combined with a wide breadth of useful and interesting content. AOL gives you information you can find without requiring you to spend an afternoon looking, or use a fancy new search engine that presents you with a long list of documents that may be useful, or may be only on the list because it is from an advertiser. Yes, the drawback is that its cost is comparatively higher than a flat-fee Internet Service Provider, but AOL is working on that, and do you really need to spend four hours a day online?

Best Online Resource For Small Business

Kevin Savetz: I'm right fond of America Online's Your Business forum (at keyword YOUR BUSINESS.) Your Business offers a variety of useful resources for small businesses, including

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Zoltrix 28.8 Int. Fax/Mod	US Robotics 28.8 Int. F/M	US Robotics 28.8 Int. F/M
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SCSI NCR 815, Kwell I/O	Teac 1.44 Floopy Drive	DIGI 16EM Eisa/Isa mp
Teac 1.44 Floopy Drive	ST31051, 1.08SGT Drive	Adtran T1/FT1 csu/dsu
ST31051, 1.08SGT Drive	ST15150, 4GB qty 2	USR 288/336 ext. qty 10
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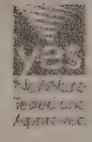
Teac 6x SCSI CD-ROM
Logitech serial mouse
104 Key Mitsumi W95 KB.
Linux loaded
$1345



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scheduled chats on every topic from multi-level marketing to making a Web page. Business strategies, links to government resources for businesses, and a forum for finding others in your industry are all covered with style. And a free weekly newsletter offers information for small business owners via email.

Michael Robin: To no one's surprise, I have to say the Internet—and I mean the Internet, not simply the World Wide Web. With time and patience, you can access a growing amount of useful business and government resources online.

Being online lets you talk directly with existing and potential customers to find out what they like and dislike about your products or services. Plus, for the foreseeable future, being online gives small businesses a fighting chance against bigger competitors—you don't have to have an office or storefront in every town or take out full-page ads in every newspaper.

Jason Boatman: I used to spend a great deal of time using AOL. I've let that account expire and have "graduated" to the Internet. I don't spend a large amount of time surfing the net: I think it's real advantage is being able to quickly find the piece of information you're looking for—I connect, I get the info, I hang up, I get on with life.

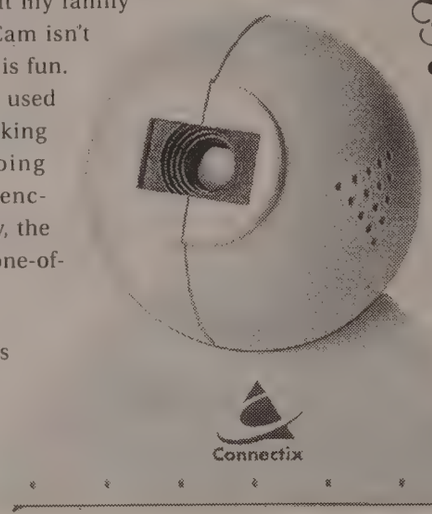
Best Hardware for Family Computing

Ed Kahn: A well-equipped family computer will already have a printer—probably a color ink jet model—and a modem. The extra piece of equipment that will multiply the tasks you can do is a Visioneer PaperPort scanner.

While this inexpensive scanner doesn't register colors, you can use it as a copy machine with your printer, and digitize recipes, newspaper clippings and assorted bits of information that often end up as scraps of paper cluttering your work area. Kids will love being able to scan in art work and then color, edit and alter it.

SupraExpress 336 Modem

Kevin Savetz: Besides a modem, the virtues of which I extol in the "Best Hardware for Home Office" category, the most innovative gadget you can bring home to your family is a QuickCam or Color QuickCam from Connectix. Priced about $100 and $200 respectively, these eyeball-shaped miniature cameras will let your kids and you make movies and take still pictures of the world around. It's a great creative outlet, and although most of what my family does with the QuickCam isn't terribly useful, it sure is fun. We have, on occasion, used the QuickCam for making reports, and even doing Internet video conferencing—but to this family, the QuickCam is mostly a one-of-a-kind toy.



Connectix QuickCam

Cassidy Allen: It's important to get plugged in to the Internet; a computer without a modem is like a house without a mailbox, except the Internet is no ordinary mailbox. With a few keystrokes, you can visit the Louvre, learn about the history of California, or get help from professors for a science project or book report.

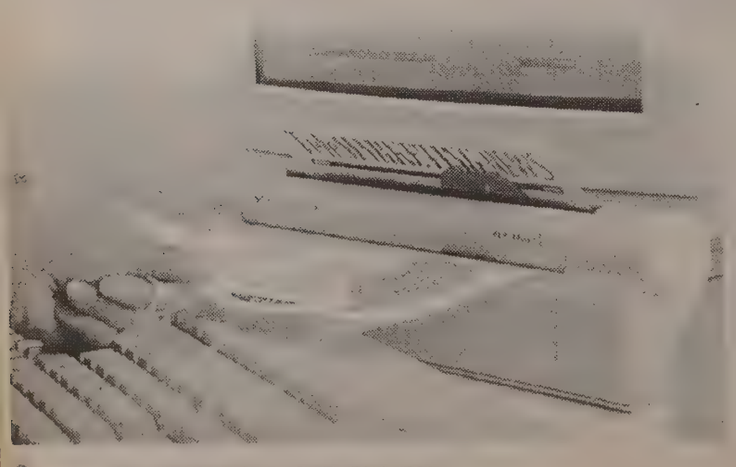
To do this quickly and therefore less expensively, you need a fast modem. There's lots of brands out there to choose from; I use a Global Village modem. What's important is that it's fast (28.8kbps is now considered the norm), and that it's easily upgradeable; an external modem can be upgraded more easily than an internal one.

Best Hardware for Home Office

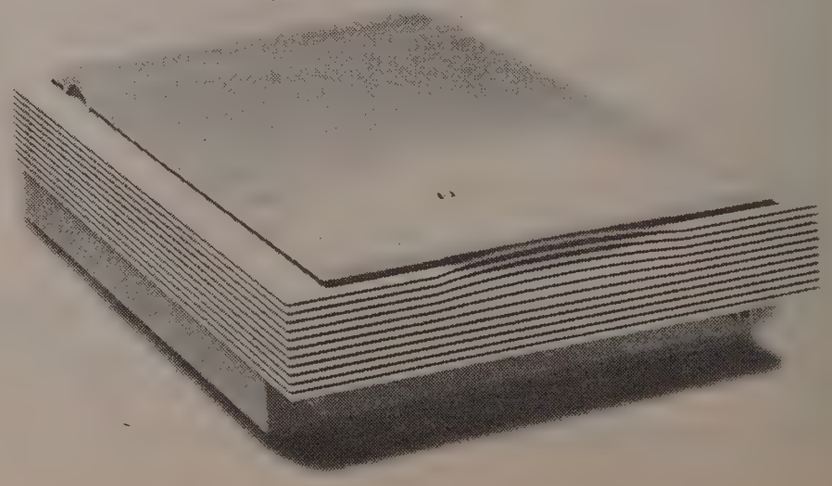
Cassidy Allen: A scanner with optical recognition (OCR) software. I use a Hewlett-Packard Scanjet IIcx flatbed scanner with OmniPage OCR software, but the Visioneer PaperPort is quickly becoming the most popular and cost-effective means of scanning/converting graphical text to editable text. Either way, it's saved me a great deal of time by eliminating the need to re-type printed text, and it gets rid of paper clutter, bringing me one step closer to the paperless office dream. For those who have used OCR software in the past and were unimpressed

continued on page 70

Visioneer PaperPort



HP Scanjet IIcx



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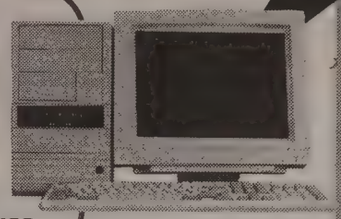

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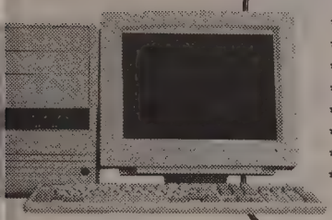

- *Intel Venus 440 FX (NEW) Chipset Motherboard
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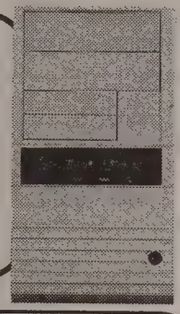

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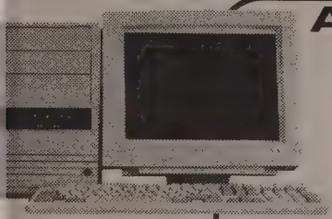
AM5x86-P75 PROCESSOR SYSTEMS



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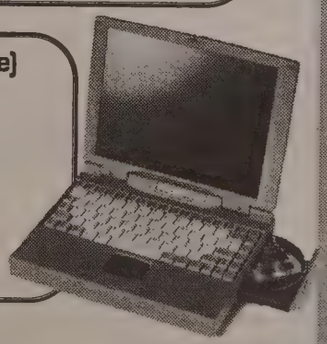

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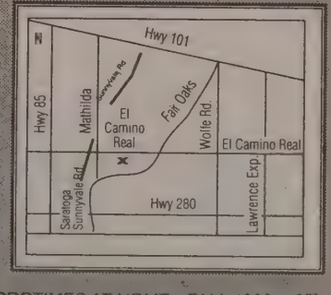

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- Fast PCI SVGA Card w/ 2MB & MPEG
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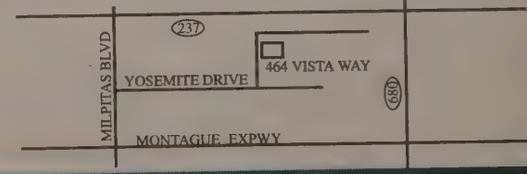

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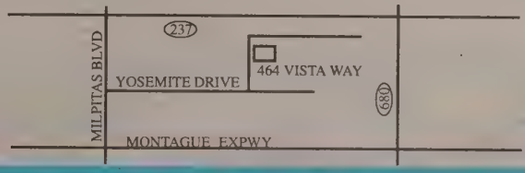

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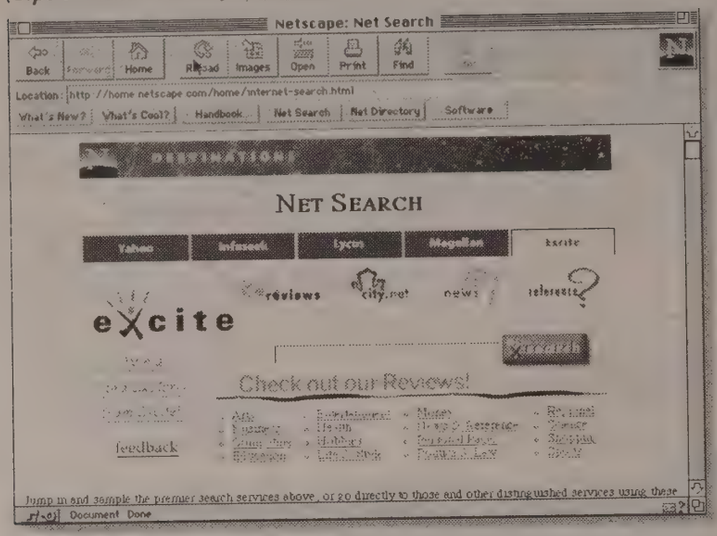
(Tips & Picks continued from page 66)



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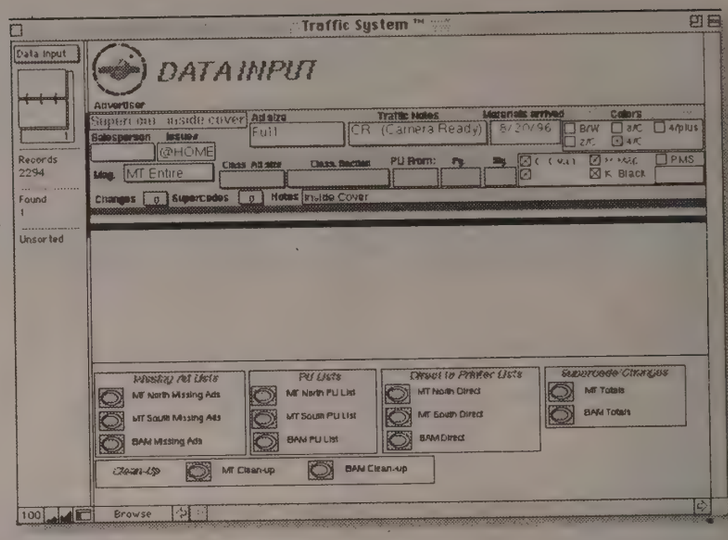


FileMaker Pro

by its recognition abilities, cast aside your doubts. You'll still get a few errors, but overall, it's amazing.

Jason Boatman: Iomega Zip Drives. Fast, inexpensive, and solid! You gotta love them.

Michael Robin: If you are going to get online, you need a good, fast fax/modem. I haven't had much luck with some of the lesser-known brands, and my two favorites are U.S. Robotics and Global Village.

The U.S. Robotics modem that I got for my father, for example, was fairly priced, truly plug-and-play, and had a real volume control on the front. The first modem I ever bought did not have a volume control and it never accepted the software commands to lower the screechy noises, which always seemed very loud late at night when everyone else was trying to sleep and I was online. Global Village modems are a bit touchy, but after getting the correct settings they are as reliable as the Rock of Gibraltar. Global Village modems include great modem and fax software as well.

Kevin Savetz: Get yourself a modem. I don't particularly care which brand or what speed (OK, OK, you should get yourself a U.S. Robotics or Supra 28.8kbps model), just get one and get thee online pronto.

Once you're connected to the Internet or an online service like America Online, you'll find it's an invaluable resource for finding information, digging up clients, and downloading free updates to your commercial software. Furthermore, you'll be able to get an electronic mail (email) address, which is one of those things, like fax machines and caffeine, that you'll be unable to fathom having ever lived without.

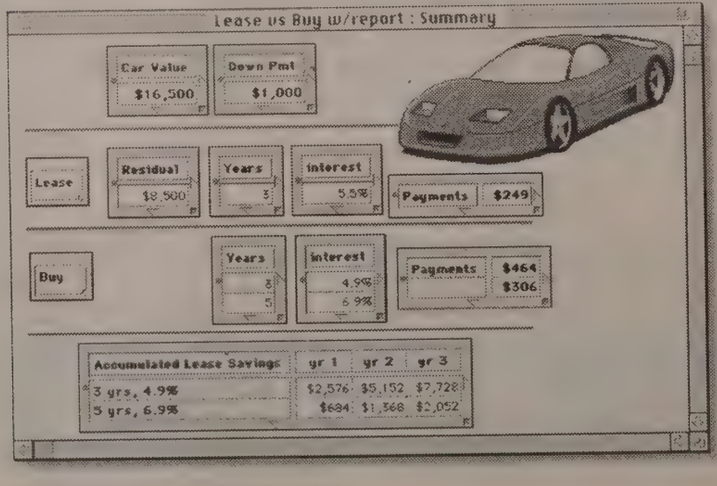
Ed Kahn: Home offices often have a fax machine. I prefer to use software that can send and receive faxes through your computer and modem. The piece of hardware that really makes this fly is a Visioneer PaperPort scanner (Mac and Windows). This piece of equipment fits on your desk claiming only a few inches of space. The scanner lets you feed in pieces of paper that can then be faxed, copied, edited, sent to your word processor or dozens of other applications. The documents can also be filed away for future retrieval. The scanner and software won't cost much more than a good fax machine, but will offer a whole lot more features and flexibility.

Tony Reveaux: There must be a special category for a product that you like because it lets you use a product that you really like. The $299 Visioneer PaperPort Vx for Macintosh has certainly been one that I have really liked. The rolling-pin-sized scanner had become indispensable for feeding in faxes-to-be, emulating a photocopier and digitizing fugitives from my paper trail.

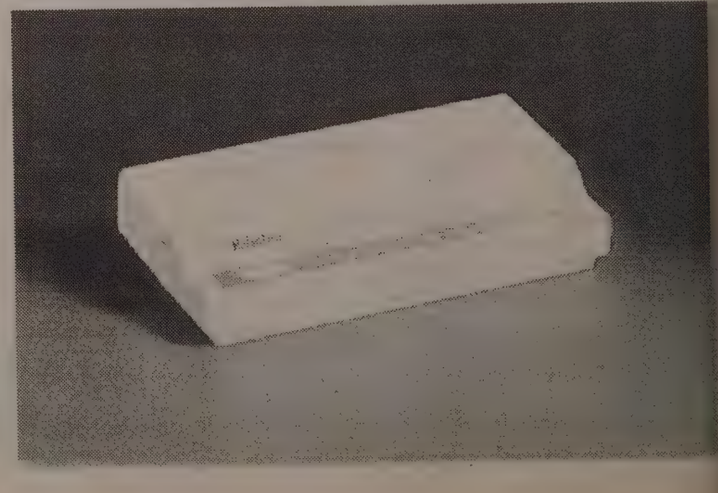
Over time, I found that my PaperPort was often incapacitated by incompatibilities with Apple's Desktop Bus (ADP) technology; enter the SCSI Upgrade. This $69.95 SCSI adapter and cable plugs into the PaperPort's AnyPort, letting the device join your various SCSI drives.

This direct connnection will boost your throughput speed for scans and OCR runs. But most importantly, the PaperPort works every time. The adapter is being bundled with new purchases, but if you have a PaperPort on the bench because of bad connections, this plug fixes the problem.

Let's Keep It Simple Spreadsheet



U.S. Robotics 28.8 Faxmodem



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- MS Ergonomic serial mouse
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- SoundBlaster 16-bit sound card
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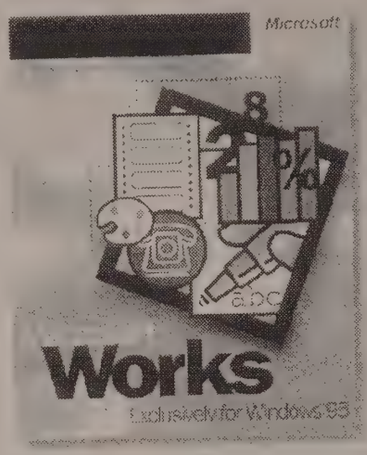
Best Home Office Software

Ed Kahn: If you are just getting started, I recommend using entry-level software. My standard recommendation for folks working on the PC platform is to begin with Microsoft Works for Windows 95. (There's also a version for Macintosh). This all-in-one program comes in either a disk or CD-ROM format. The disk version is less expensive and includes only the Works programs; the CD-ROM version costs a little more, but has a huge collection of reference works available. If you have a CD-ROM drive, it is worth the extra twenty bucks. What you get in the Works program is an entry-level word processor, spreadsheet, database program and communications program.



Kevin Savetz: A novel idea—and one that has been a long time in coming—is a spreadsheet for the rest of us. Let's Keep It Simple Spreadsheet from Casady & Greene is a marked improvement for those of us who never could figure out Microsoft Excel. KISS offers most of the functions one needs in a spreadsheet, but its intuitive toolbars, readable (but thankfully thin) manual and copious online help make it a simple pleasure to crunch numbers. KISS also makes it easy to create charts and graphs to visualize your data. KISS costs about $125, and you'll get a $25 rebate when you send in the registration card. KISS is currently only available for the Mac; a Windows version is forthcoming. Goodbye Excel, I won't miss you.

Cassidy Allen: Every office needs to stay organized to operate efficiently, and to stay organized, you need a good database program. I'd like to be able to come up with an obscure gem here, but Claris' FileMaker Pro wins simply because it is so powerful and easy-to-use. I've used it for simple reasons, such as a telephone/address book, and I've used it for monstrously complicated ones, such as tracking *MicroTimes'* advertising materials and issuing reports to sales reps regarding the status of those materials. FileMaker Pro's ability to present the same information in a myriad of easy-to-create layouts made my duties manageable instead of daunting, and the ability to modify database entries instead of re-entering them was a huge time-saver.

Jason Boatman: Microsoft Office (hate to admit it...), Quicken, FileMaker Pro 3.0, and Global Village Fax software.

I use my computer about once a day for anywhere between ten minutes and two hours. My computer is on 24/7 and functions as my email center and fax machine; it performs a number of other home office-type tasks from a single box. I check it every day after work the way you might check an answering machine...it's in the center of the apartment, figuratively and literally.

I use Quicken Deluxe with the online banking module to access my Wells Fargo accounts – it's incredible being able to balance to the penny at any moment. I don't need to keep a register in my checkbook or carry around ATM receipts. And, every little bank transaction (such as non–Wells Fargo ATM charges or interest earned to savings) appears automatically. The budgeting module is adequate for my finances, as is the investment portfolio system. Additionally, It's a fairly simple matter to move information into Excel 5.0, where you can further customize reports and graphs of your finances.

Also, I can work at home using Apple Remote Access—and if I choose, get ahead on projects I'm pursuing at work.

Michael Robin: Internet Valet, from InterCon (originally by Software Ventures, but these two companies merged earlier this year), is an easy-to-install, easy-to-configure, and easy-to-use suite of Internet applications for Macintosh.

While it includes the usual group of software that you will need for the Macintosh—MacTCP and MacPPP software, Eudora, Fetch, TurboGopher, NewsWatcher, MicroPhone Telnet, and, starting with version 2, Netscape rather than Enhanced Mosaic—several features help make this package stand out in a crowded field. A version for Windows is also available.

First, Software Ventures has created a version of its MicroPhone communications software to work as a telnet application. This means you can continue to work on the Internet with the same functionality that you have grown accustomed to using MicroPhone elsewhere online.

Second, you have three choices when installing Internet Valet: the most important one is "configure Internet Valet without signing up for Internet service and without changing existing TCP/IP settings." If your computer is already set up for connecting to your favorite Internet Service Provider, Internet Valet will not wipe out any of that information and you will not have to waste the rest of the day trying to reset everything.

Last, even though Netscape and Eudora are included in most ISP start-up packages, they are a *must* for surfing the Web and managing your email.

Best Educational Software

Pamela Mason: Designed for pre-schoolers, My Very First Software teaches, then reinforces, the computer basics. It has a character-based interface with "Cybee", the alien guide, who helps the kids on their journey. With clever self-paced games, they learn that when you drag the mouse a cursor appears on the screen. Next, of course, is clicking, then dragging, and lastly, how to use the keyboard. "Since we know that children learn faster when new information is incorporated in familiar surroundings, we developed our games and practice sessions in familiar settings such as kitchens, children's bedrooms and playrooms," says Betty Pearlin, Vroom Books brand manager. "My Very First Software is a great way to show kids how much fun a computer can be."

My Very First Software is well-designed and developmentally appropriate for very young children. The graphics are delightful and extremely engaging. It was remarkable to see my two-and-a-half year old son's excitment, and his rapid progress, as he used this package. He especially loves the animated purple monster who teaches computer vocabulary! (CD-ROM for Macintosh, Windows, and Windows 95).

Cassidy Allen: In general, you cannot go wrong with anything produced by Dorling-Kindersley. Famous for their innovative Eyewitness reference books for children, DK has adapted many of their titles to CD-ROM with charming and astounding results. In particular, DK's multimedia version of David MacCaulay's The Way Things Work is a visual, aural, and intellectual triumph in learning. Another, lesser-known title is Stowaway, in which kids (and adults too) almost unconsciously learn about the layout of and life aboard an 18th-century warship while trying to find a crafty stowaway amongst the maze of cabins and staterooms. You even visit the ship's surgery and get a lesson in the brutality of war as you watch a cartoon sailor get his leg amputated!

Mary Eisenhart: Hyperglot's Learn To Speak Spanish CD-ROM takes the multimedia approach to spoken Spanish. Video clips accompany each lesson, presenting situations a

continued on page 122

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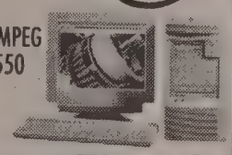
- Mini Tower w/PS
- 104 Win 95 Keyboard
- Mouse w/Pad
- 14" .28 NI SVGA Monitor



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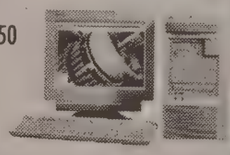

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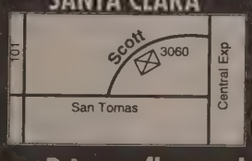

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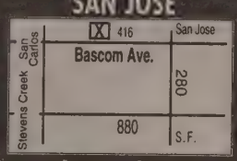

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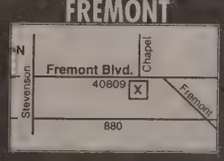

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HELP WHEN YOU NEED IT

WHAT TO DO WHEN SOMETHING GOES WRONG

BY T. J. HOHMANN

So you've just gotten your new "information appliance." You diligently studied the market, read through *MicroTimes* and bought a good computer for a good price.

You've set it up according to the instructions, and now you're ready for endless hours of trouble-free computing.

If this sounds like your experience, you're either extremely lucky (like, lottery-winner lucky) or you're living somewhere in the future. While home computing has come a long, long way from its hacker-geek roots, PCs (and even Macs) are still complicated conglomerations of hardware and software, and they're getting progressively more complex. It'll be quite a while before operating your computer is as simple as, say, programming your VCR.

What does this mean to you, the proud owner? It means that sooner or later, you're going to have a problem. It may be a small but annoying problem, tempting you to ignore it but always jabbing at you. Or it may be something major that makes you want to chuck the whole machine out the window (if only you could be sure that you'd bean the cretin who built it). Luckily for you, help is available. Most manufacturers of computer hardware and software offer varying types of technical support for you, their valued customer. Some do better than others. Some charge, some don't. And as more and more inexperienced people buy computers, demand for technical support has skyrocketed (and supply has frequently not kept up). So how do you find the answers to your problems?

When In Doubt, Read The Manual

It may sound trite, but your first step ought to be reading the manual. This goes against the grain for most of us, but it really is the best first step.

In particular, look for a section called "Troubleshooting," and skim through it for problems that look like yours. This is where you'll be advised to make sure that everything's plugged in and turned on (thus avoiding a particularly embarrassing phone call to a support person), or find out that your software needs 256 colors to run, and won't work at 16-bit. The manufacturer's manual will probably also refer you to additional help via phone, Web or email.

Books

Beyond that level of help, though, the "owner's manual" may be limited. Computer and software makers know that manuals don't sell products, and unfortunately that's often reflected in the quality of the documentation they provide.

It's probably not a coincidence, for example, that the manual for Windows 95 is exactly 95 pages. It's probably also not a coincidence that you could easily compile a 95-page index of aftermarket Windows 95 books.

Dozens of books are available for computer hardware and most software programs. If you're a dedicated do-it-yourselfer, it may be worth browsing the computer section of your local bookstore.

But maybe you're not the "DIY" type, and didn't buy a computer to become a technician. You don't want an education, you want HELP, and you've exhausted all of the simple fixes in the troubleshooting guide.

At this point, you have three basic options: telephone, online support or live support.

Diagnose The Problem

Before you start asking anyone for help, though, you need to do some deep thinking to determine exactly what the problem is. What is the computer doing that it's not supposed to? Or what is it not doing that it should?

For instance, if you're having a problem with your modem, will it work with America Online but not with Netscape? If so, you've probably got a software compatibility problem. If the modem doesn't work with anything, it *may* be a hardware problem.

If the computer is giving you error messages, write them down exactly as they appear on the screen. They may be gibberish to you, but might lead a support person right to the problem. Knowing where the problem lies is also the first step in determining where to look for help. Even though you may have nothing but Microsoft products on your hard drive, the Microsoft support folks aren't going to be able to help you if the drive dies. You'll need to call the computer or drive manufacturer about that.

Aside from specific information about your problem, you also need to gather as much information about your system as you can, since anyone trying to help you will need to know the basics. So if you haven't read the manuals yet, you at least need to mine this information out of them.

At a minimum, you should have the following available:

1) Make and model of your computer

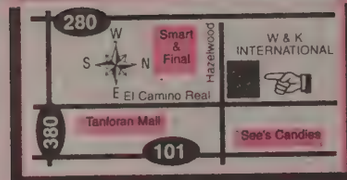
2) Part and/or serial number

3) Processor type and speed (e.g., Intel Pentium 75 MHz)

4) Operating system, including version/release (e.g., Windows 3.11)

5) Make, model, part number of any troublesome hardware (drive, modem, sound card, etc.)

6) For broken software, the exact title, version or release, and media (floppy disk or CD-ROM). You should also know whether it came preloaded on your computer or was installed later.



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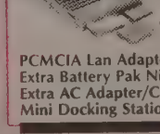

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S.Blaster 16/120W SPK		S Blaster 16/120W SPK		S.Blaster 16/120W SPK		S. Blaster 16/60W SPK		S.Blaster 16/SPK	
104 Keys/Logitech Mouse		104 Keys/Logitech Mouse		104 Keys/Logitech Mouse		104 Keys/Logitech Mouse		104 Keys/Logitech	
US Robotics 33.6 Fax		33.6 KBS Fax/Modem		33.6 KBS Fax/Modem		14.4 KBS Fax/Modem		14.4 KBS Fax/Modem	
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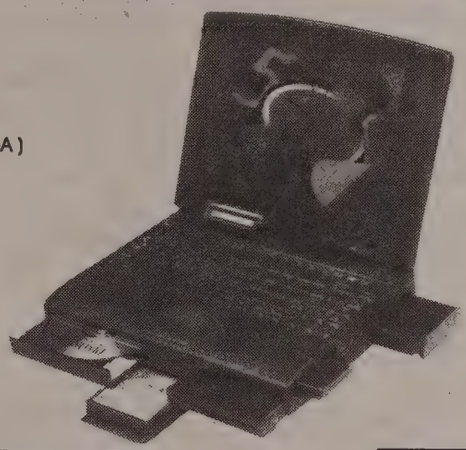

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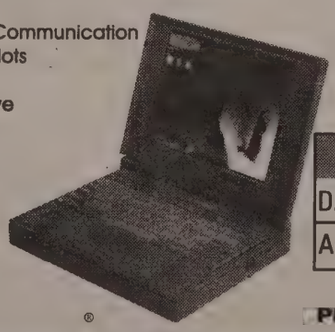

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Phone Support

For most of us, the first impulse when seeking help is to pick up the phone. Toll-free telephone tech support is a major selling point for many manufacturers.

The plus to phone support is that, at least theoretically, it's effective and convenient. From the comfort of your home or office, you get to tell your troubles to a real person, who is trained to help you solve them.

The downside is that it's free and it's theoretically effective and convenient, so everybody uses it. If you have problems with a popular brand of computer or a best-selling software program, expect to get plenty of busy signals, and spend plenty of time on hold when you do get through.

Tech support also tends to lag behind sales growth for many companies. If the company you're calling is in the process of ramping up their phone support, you might find yourself on the line with a "new guy," rather than the experienced answer person you hoped for.

You can make calling phone support less painful, though. First of all, try calling during off hours. Many tech support operations are staffed all day, every day. If you call at 4 pm on Christmas Day (when everybody else in the world has also just tried to boot their new computer and experienced their first glitch), you'll be lucky to get past a busy signal. But if you call at 3 am on a Tuesday, you might have four or five bored techs battling to take your call. Once you get a person on the line, be prepared to state the particulars of your system and your problem. In fact, it's best to be sitting at your computer when you call, so the tech can talk you through any diagnostic routines or solutions.

Because there has been such demand for phone support (and, frankly, since many people are wasting the techs' time with inappropriate questions), many companies are starting to charge for it. Some manufacturers now offer free support for a limited time (anywhere from thirty days to a year), and offer phone support for a fee after that. Some others offer service via a toll-free line that's always busy, but also offer a 1-900 line for those willing to pay to get through.

continued on page 84

Avoiding Trouble In The First Place: Ask Online

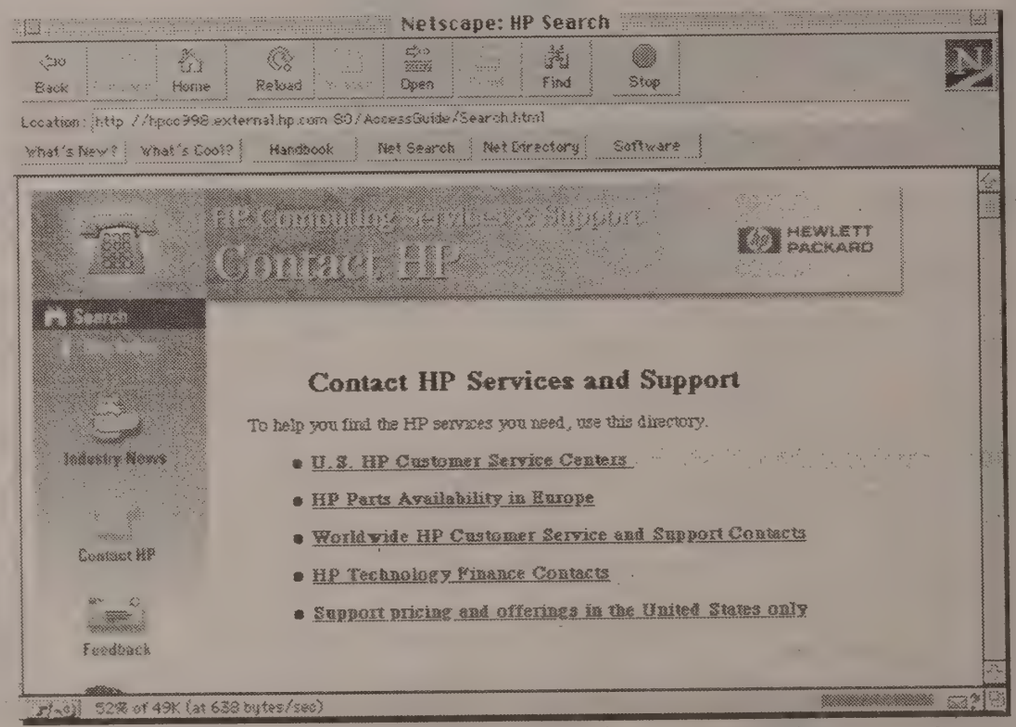
WHEN YOU'RE SHOPPING FOR A NEW COMPUTER, THERE ARE PLENTY OF SOURCES OF ADVICE out there. Magazines, salespeople, friends and consultants are all willing to tell you exactly what you should buy and what you should avoid. But another source of buying information is emerging, allowing you to get information about the hardware and software you're considering right from the horse's mouth—users who already have the stuff.

Most major manufacturers now offer some form of online support on the Internet and/or the major online services. These support forums are invaluable if you're having problems with equipment or software you already own. But why wait until you've bought some trouble to take a look? You can use these online areas to see what problems owners are having with the equipment and software you're considering.

Once you've narrowed down your choices to a couple of brands, use the search function on your online service or your favorite Web search engine to look for the name of the vendor. If you get too many hits, you might narrow the search by adding terms like "tech support." These searches should take you to the support areas you're interested in, and browsing through the questions and answers will give you a pretty good picture of your prospective purchase.

You should be able to tell a lot about the gear you're interested in by the types of problems people are asking about. If lots of people are complaining about their computers failing right out of the box, you might want to steer away from that brand, no matter how good the sale price is at your local store.

You might find out that some of the bundled software doesn't work as advertised. Or that certain peripherals just aren't compatible with certain computers. Users frequently ask about upgrading their computers, so you can see whether adding a second hard drive, for instance, will be a fifteen-minute task or a lifetime pursuit. You can also post your own message, telling folks what you're planning to buy and asking for their feedback and recommendations.



The other thing to look at closely is the quality of support provided on the site. If the forum is run by the manufacturer (some aren't, but are strictly volunteer), then take a look at how promptly the tech rep answers his mail.

You'll probably also encounter lots of messages referring to the quality of the company's telephone support, since many of the posters will have already tried that avenue. If most of those posts have titles like "This company's service sucks!!!!!," you might want to re-think becoming one of their customers. You might never need tech support, but if you should it's nice to know what to expect.

In checking out these online tech support areas, keep in mind that most of the people on them are having a problem with their computer. There may be millions of very happy owners out there for each one who posts a problem online. It's sort of like going down to the local jail and asking people what they think of the justice system. Most of the people there will be unsatisfied, but they don't necessarily reflect the general population.

For most of us, a new computer is a major expenditure, and we'd like to get it right the first time. If you use all of the sources of information available to you, you can make a more informed decision and reduce your chances of being stuck with a lemon.

—T.J. Hohmann

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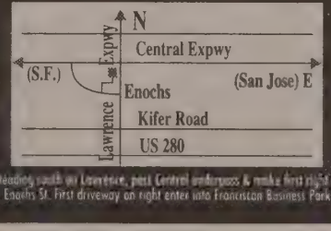

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- 1.44 MB Floppy Drive
- EIDE w/2S/1P(16550)
- 1.6GB EIDE HD
- ATI Mach 64 Video w/1MB
- 16 Bit Sound Card On Board
- 8 Speed CD-ROM & Speaker
- ViewMagic15".28dp N-INT SVGA
- Mitsumi 104-key Keyboard
- Supra 28800 Fax / Modem
- Mini Tower Case w/230w P.S.
- Microsoft Windows 95
- Mouse

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- TO P133/P166 ..... $94/$289
- TO Pentium 200 ..... $599
- TO Pentium pro 200 ..... $599

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- Asus Dual Pentium Main Board
- 4 PCI / 4 ISA Slots 256 k cache
- 32MB 72 Pin RAM 60ns
- 1.44 MB Floppy Drive
- 2S1P1G IO(16550)
- 8x CD ROM
- 1.6 GB EIDE HD
- Diamond Stealth 64 PCI w/1MB
- ViewMagic15".28dp N-INT SVGA
- Mitsum 104-key Keyboard
- MS Window NT 3.51 Station
- Medium Tower Case
- 250-Watt Power Supply
- Microsoft Mouse

$1499

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- TO Pentium 120/133 ..... $19/$94
- TO Dual Pentium Pro 200 w/one Pentium Pro 200 CPU $799

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FUJITSU
- M1614TAU1.0GB11ms IDE $194
- M1614SAU 1.0GB 11ms SCSI-2 ..... $244
- M2915SAU 2.0GB 9ms SCSI-2 ..... $499
- M2934SAU 4.3GB 9ms SCSI-2 ..... $849
- M29150QAU 2GB 9ms Wide SCSI $479

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- HP3725S 2.1GB 8.9ms SCSI-II $394
- HP C2490SE 2.1GB 8.5 ms SCSI-2 ..... $519

IBM
- **UltraStar 32160 2.1GB 8.5ms SCSI-2 ..... $379**
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- ZIP Drive 100MB External Parallel/SCSI $183
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- ZIP 100 MB Cartridge10-pack $150
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- PCMCIA type III 340MB IDE $459

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- MXT-7850 850MB IDE $184
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- MC-4221W 2.1GB 8.5ms Wide SCSI $729
- MC-1936AV 3.0 GB SCSI-2 Audio/Video $899
- MC-3243 4.0GB 8.5ms SCSI-2 ..... $929
- MC-3243AV 4.0GB 8.5 ms SCSI-2 Auio/Video $1039
- MC-1991 9GB 10ms 5.25" SCSI-2 ..... $1789
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- BIGFOOT 1.2GB IDE $174
- BIGFOOT 2.5GB EIDE $259
- Siroccon 1700AT 1.7 GB 11ms EIDE $219
- TR-850S 850MB 14ms SCSI-II $189
- XP-32150W 2.1 GB 8.5ms Wide SCSI 512k $449
- VP-32210S 2.2GB SCSI-2 ..... $419
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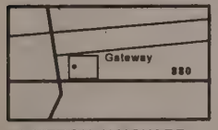

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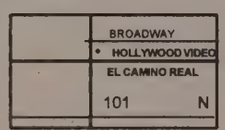

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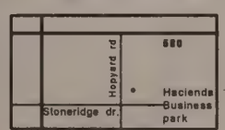

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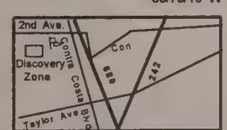

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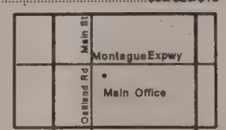

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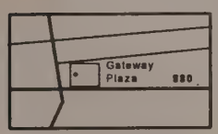

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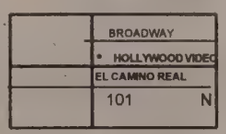

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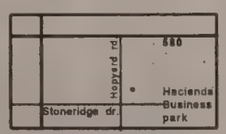

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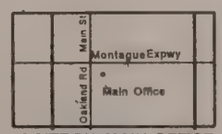

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(Help When You Need It continued from page 78)

Friends And Family

If phone support isn't working for you, it may be time to call in live help.

Probably your first option is to call a computer-wise friend, relative or colleague. These folks will usually respond to pleas for help, especially if you offer your undying gratitude (plus food and beverage) as compensation.

Problem is, you may get what you pay for. Your brother-in-law may turn out to be a computer genius who can fix your problem in a minute. Or he may be a human computer virus, just waiting to screw up your system even further and void your warranty while he's at it.

If you don't mind making your computer a part of your social life, you might consider getting involved with a local "user group" for your type of computer. These are basically computer clubs, and you'll likely find a lot of knowledge there. Again, however, you won't know for sure how good the advice is until you try it.

The Shop

And if you get really stuck, and/or don't mind paying a large premium, you can call your friendly computer repair shop.

Your first choice should be the store where you bought your computer, especially if you think the problem might be covered under warranty. You should also look in the manual (again!) for authorized service providers in your area. In fact, you might try calling one of these service providers first, to tell them about your problem. They'll probably be relatively familiar with your system, so they might be able to help you over the phone. And if they don't have the answer, they usually have access to better phone support from the factory than you'll ever get.

Online Support

Another type of tech support that's becoming increasingly popular is online support. When you look for support phone numbers, you might also find an email address for technical support.

Many software and hardware producers maintain support areas on major online services like Prodigy, CompuServe and America Online, as well as Web sites and newsgroups. These services allow you to post your question online (of course, this assumes that getting online is not the problem you're trying to get fixed), and get an answer posted to the site or sent to you via email. Use the search function in your online service or an Internet search engine like Yahoo or Webcrawler to find sites that relate to your equipment or software.

As with phone support, some manufacturers do a very good job with online support, giving prompt, helpful information. Some are still behind the power curve, with techs who give vague, canned answers to every question (or worse, don't bother to answer at all).

Even within the same company, the quality of support varies depending on where you post your question. One company we've had experience with operates sites on two online services. On one, responses are usually posted in a couple of days. On the other, the technician frequently has mail a month old that he hasn't even read!

There are also support areas which are not supported or sanctioned by the manufacturer, but are run by volunteer users. You'll often get a quicker response from these sites, and usually get a broader and more creative range of solutions. But the caveats about help from friends, relatives and user groups also apply here.

As long as you can afford to wait a day or two for your answer, online support can be much more convenient than phone support, since you don't have to worry about busy signals or hold buttons. But you should still be as efficient as possible when using it. Before you blast your question onto the net, browse through some of the other questions. If your problem is a common one, you might find that it has already been asked and answered.

Look also for a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) file. Again, few problems are unique, and yours has probably been encountered by somebody else.

If you don't find the solution to your problem already on the net, it's time to ask. Again, it's important to ask a specific, well-thought-out question and give the tech the information he'll need to answer your question.

Don't just say, "Hey, I have a problem!" The same information you collected for phone support should go into your initial post. If you don't put it in, your first response from the tech will almost certainly be something along the lines of, "Why don't you tell me more about your system and your problem?" The first round of communication (which may take several days) will have been a waste of your time and theirs.

Ideally, getting technical support for your computer, peripherals and software should be relatively painless. What you want are fast, accurate answers which solve all your problems. But then again, ideally you won't have any problems to solve. Since we don't live in an ideal world, you might as well make the best of it and use the support you have available as efficiently as possible. ■

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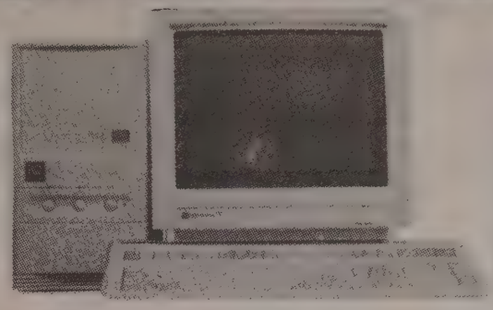

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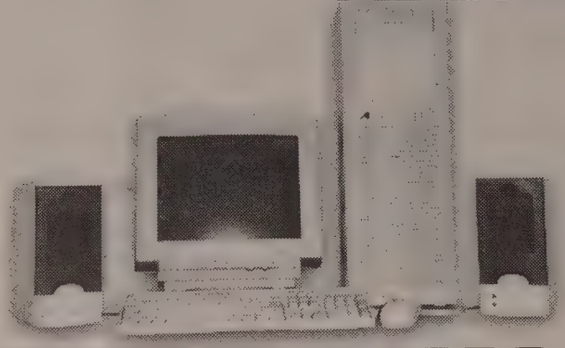

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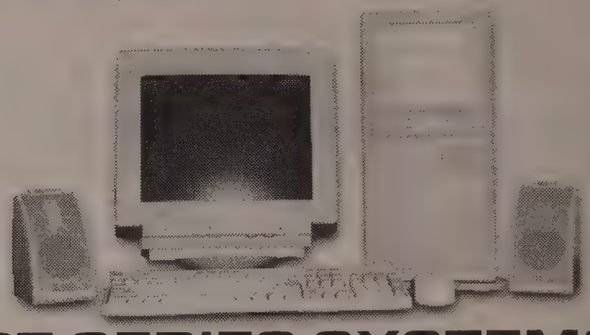

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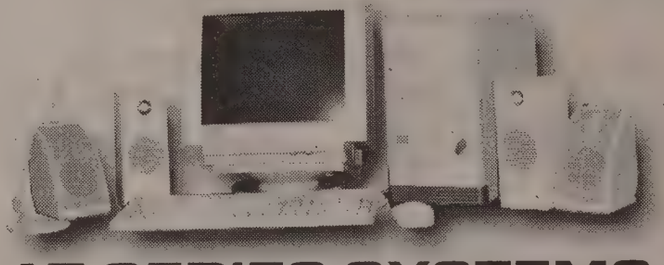

AT-SERIES SYSTEMS
WINDOWS 95 READY

• Intel Triton Chipset Motherboard • 256K Pipeline Cache • 8MB EDO RAM • 1.09GB IDE Hard Drive
• Mini Tower Case • Teac 1.44MB Floppy Drive • 1MB SVGA Card • 14" SVGA (Tantung) Monitor
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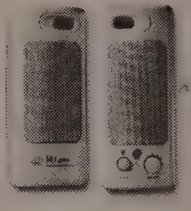

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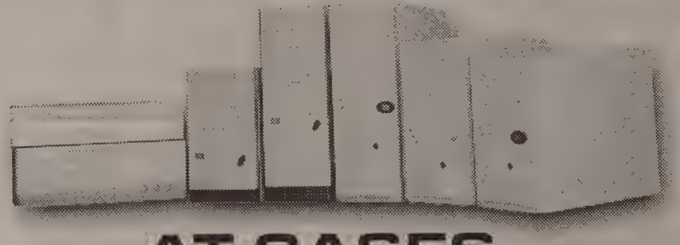

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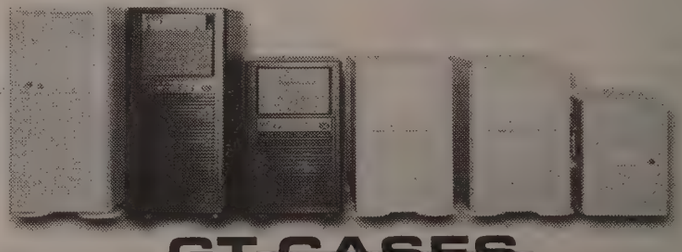

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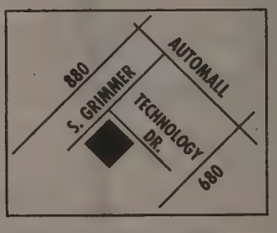

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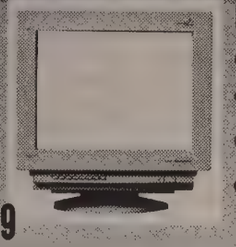

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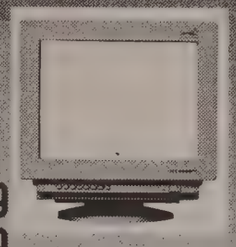

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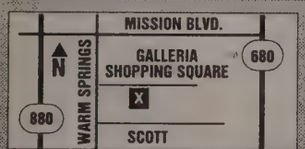

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(So You Wanna Buy A Computer continued from page 22)

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The ultimate leap of faith is mail order. This may be an option for experienced users. Obviously a mail order vendor must include the shipping cost in the selling price, but high volume and low overhead make it possible for some mail order vendors to offer good deals.

When To Buy

The computer industry is an intensely seasonal business, with sharp peaks in the August-September "back to school" period and the November-December holiday buying frenzy. Logic suggests that the best times to make a deal are the off-peak months, particularly the January slump, when vendors need to dump excess inventory for tax reasons.

Nevertheless, the best time to buy a computer is when you need one to do the work at hand. You will know when that time comes. ■

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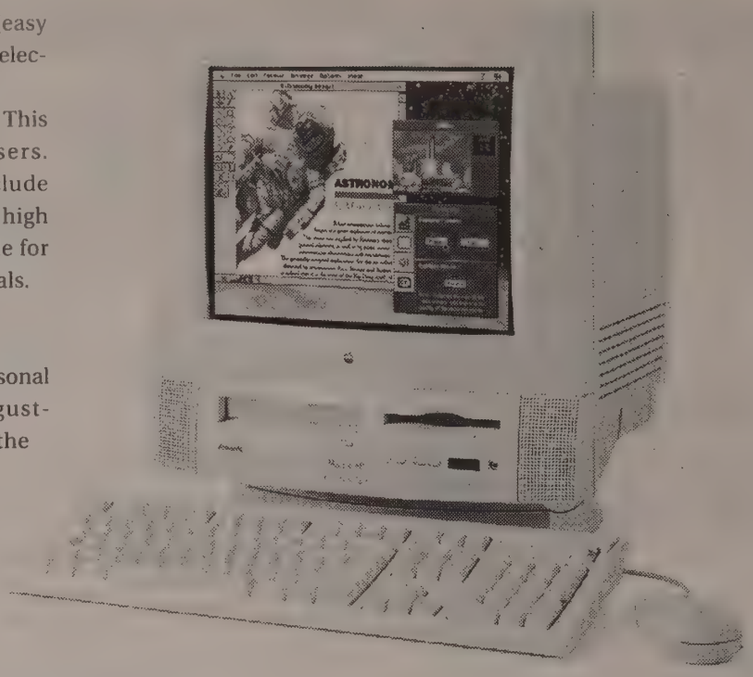

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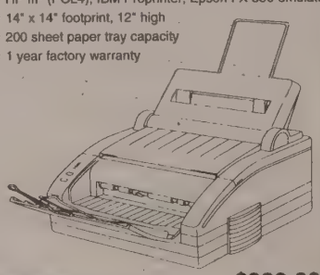

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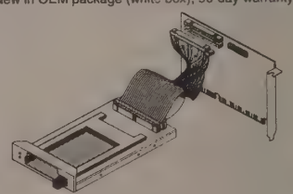

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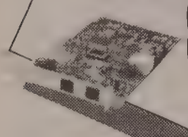

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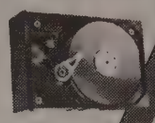

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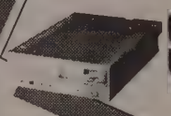

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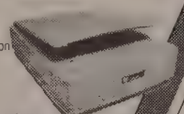

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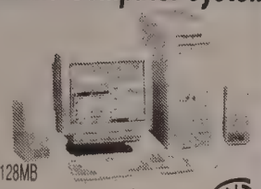

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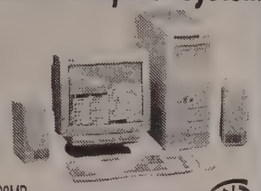

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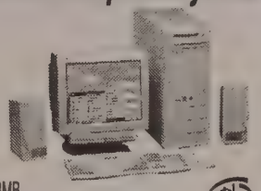

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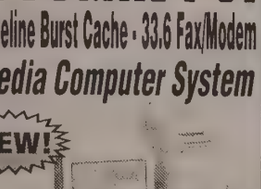

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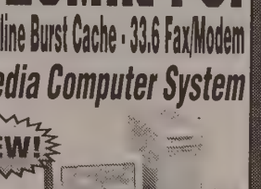

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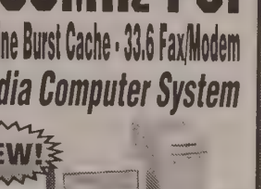

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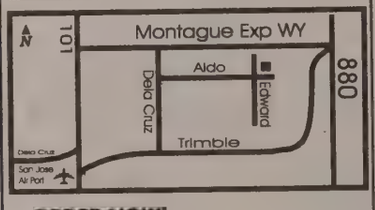

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AMIGA

AGA Flyers. Meetings: 7th of each month, 7:00 pm, 236 Waller St., San Francisco. We are Video Flyer, Lightwave, Imagine, ShapeShifter, and Amiga geeks! Contact: Corky Engel, (415)431-9111.

AWEST—Amiga Users In SF. Meetings: 2nd Wed., 6:30 pm, Excelsior Branch Public Library, 4400 Mission St. (near Ocean), San Francisco.

ATARI

ABACUS—Atari Bay Area Computer Users Society. Meetings: 1st Sat., 1:00 pm, Potrero Branch Public Library, 2nd floor, 1616 20th St., San Francisco. Supporting all Atari computers and video games systems. Call: Roger Sinasohn, (415)469-7924.

San Leandro Computer Club. Meetings: 1st Tues., 8:00 pm, San Leandro Main Library, Estudillo Room, 300 Estudillo Ave. Call: Robbie, (510)797-5636.

CAD

BMUG CAD Special Interest Group. Meetings: last Tues., 6:00-7:45 pm, Center for Electronic Art, San Francisco.

Marin AutoCAD Users Group (MAUG). Meetings: 1st Thurs., 6:30 pm, Autodesk, 111 McInnis Pkwy., Demo Rm., San Rafael (next to Embassy Suites). Call: Priscilla Mills, (415)491-9111.

COMMODORE

C-HUG (Commodore Hayward User Group). Meetings: 2nd Sat., 2:00 pm, Palma Ceia Park Clubhouse, Hayward. Commodore 64 and 128 owners are welcome to attend. Call: (510)531-3734 or 793-7868.

Diablo Valley Commodore Users Group. Meetings: 3rd Thurs., 7:00 pm, Contra Costa Water District Anteroom, 1331 Concord Ave., Concord. Call: (510) 689-3224.

FUNHUG (Fremont, Union City, Newark, Hayward User Group). Meetings: 3rd Thurs., 7:00 pm, Newark Public Library, 6300 Civic Terrace Ave., Newark. For the Commodore 64/128 computer. Call: (510)793-7868 or 793-2514.

IBM AND COMPATIBLES

AT&T Computer Users Group. Meetings: 1st Wed., 7:00 pm, 50 Fremont St., 40th Floor (near 1st and Mission), San Francisco. Demonstrations, technical support, informal discussion. Call: (415)885-6631.

Berkeley PC Users Group—BPCUG. Meetings: 2nd and 4th Tues., Winner's Circle Systems, 2618 Telegraph Ave., Berkeley. Public domain library, newsletter, and separate Beginners Special Interest Group meeting. Contact: Mel Mann, (510)526-4033.

The Software Forum. Meetings: 1st Tues., 7:00 pm, Center for Software Development, 111 W. St. John St., Ste. 200, San Jose. $10. Call: Mike Schmit, (408)244-6826 or *mschmit@ix.netcom.com*.

Diablo Valley User Group—DVPC. Meetings: 1st Thurs., 7:30 pm, Bank of America, Bldg. B, 2001 Clayton Rd. at Galindo, Walnut Creek. SIGs include Internet, Windows, Beginner's, Visual Basic, education/entertainment, and more. Call: (510)556-1449.

East Bay FOG. Meetings: 2nd Wed., 7:30 pm, Episcopal Church of St. John-in-Montclair, 1707 Gouldin Rd., Oakland. All microcomputers, MS-DOS, CP/M. Call: (510) 653-2627, 8 am–10 pm.

Golden Gate Computer Society. Meetings: 4th Mon., 7:00 pm, San Rafael Community Center, 618 B St., San Rafael. Free intro to computers class at 6:00 pm. Call: (415)454-5556.

Microsoft Access Mid-Peninsula User Group. Meetings: 2nd Fri., Microsoft, 950 Tower Lane, Foster City. Contact: Jay Stewart, (415)567-7979.

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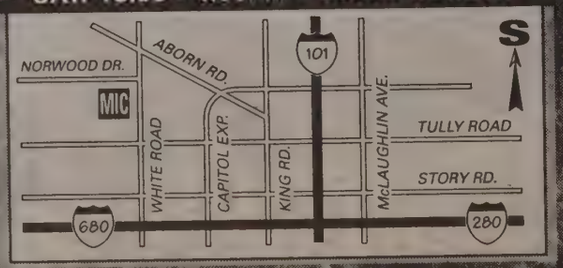

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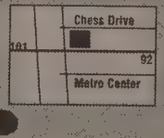

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Napa Valley PC Users Group. Meetings: 2nd Wed., 7:30 pm. Guests welcome. Call: Lee Schwab, (707)257-2675 or *lee@community.net* for details and location.

San Francisco Business Computers. Meetings: 4th Tues., 5:30 pm, 110 Pacific, #153, San Francisco. For people who use computers in their work. Visitors $10. Call: (415)788-5338 or *425-1545@mcimail.com* .

San Francisco PC Users Group. Meetings: 3rd Tues., 7:30 pm, UCSF, 3333 California St., San Francisco. Presentations, Q&A sessions. Call: Jerry Stern, (415)572-1100 or 777-1332 for recorded events message. URL: *http://www.sfpcug.org/~group* .

INTERNATIONAL

International Macintosh Users Group (IMUG). Meetings: 3rd Thurs., 7:00 pm, Apple Computer, R&D Campus, 1 Infinite Loop, Cupertino. A forum for multilingual/multi-script computing. Call: Roger Sherman, (415)859-5146.

International Software SIG Of The Software Forum. Meetings: 3rd Mon., 7:00 pm, Cubberly Community Ctr., 4000 Middlefield Rd., Rm. A-2, Palo Alto. $10. Call: Charlie Pfefferkorn, (408)923-7570 or *charliep@crystal-media.com* .

INTERNET

BCOOL (Bay Area Computer Org. On-Line). Meetings: 2nd Fri., location varies. Free online classes, tech support, discussions, Web surfing, novices welcome, more. Contact: Lloyd, (415)459-8916, BBS (415)459-6094.

Internet SIG Of The Software Forum. Meetings: 2nd Wed., 7:00 pm, Sun Microsystems, 2750 Coast, Bldg. 6, Mountain View. $10. Call: Walt Schilling, (415)390-9477 or *walters@svpal.org* .

LEGAL

Bay Area CompuLaw Users Group. Meetings: every two months, Downtown San Francisco. Support/networking group of users of CompuLaw software. Free. Contact: Edward Zeidan, (510)283-5666 or *ezeidan@isconsult.com* .

MACINTOSH

Association Of A32 Users. Meetings: 2nd Sat., 10:00 am, Sunnyvale Community Center Arboretum, 550 E. Remington Ave. (near corner of El Camino and Fair Oaks). Q&A session; guest speakers and vendor demonstrations; shareware, freeware, and PD software disks. Call: (408)263-0398.

BMUG—Berkeley Macintosh User Group. Meetings: every Thurs., 6:30 pm, 2040 VLSB, UC Berkeley. Also free basic Mac classes every Tuesday, 7:00 pm at 2055 Center St., Berkeley. Call: (510)549-BMUG.

Diablo Valley Macintosh User Group (DVMUG). Meetings: 3rd Tues., 6:30 pm, Bancroft School, 2200 Parish Dr., Walnut Creek. Get together with Mac and Performa users. Many SIG meetings. Call: Tom Bacon, (510)945-4548.

maCruzers of Santa Cruz. Meetings: 2nd. Wed., Community Center, 4440 Jade Street, Capitola, CA. Great demos, major players, DTP SIG, online SIG, educational SIG, music SIG, BBS, newsletter, more. Contact: (408)426-3739 or *Chriss@cruzio.com* .

Macs Of Marin. Meetings: last Wed., 7:30 pm, Corte Madera Rec. Center, 498 Tamalpais Dr., Marin. Q&A 7:30, meeting 8:30, members free, nonmembers $5. Call: Richard, (415) 485-5596.

Mt. Diablo Users Group (MDUG). Meetings: 2nd Wed., 7:30 pm, 3101 Crow Canyon Rd. (Glendale Fed. S&L community room), San Ramon. Exchange experiences, ideas and find solutions to software and hardware problems. Contact: Rym, (510)829-5501

OpenDoc/Macintosh SIG Of The Software Forum. Meetings: 3rd Tues., 7:00 pm, Apple Computers, DeAnza 3, Beatles Room, Mariani Ave, Cupertino. $10. Call: Tony Meadow, (510) 834-5300 or *tmeadow@bearriver.com* .

TriValley Macintosh User Group (TMUG). Meetings: 3rd Tues., 7:30 pm, Sonoma School, 543 Sonoma Ave., Livermore. Beginners to experts; library, newsletter, SIGs, and a BBS. Call: Jerry, (510)828-0959.

MISCELLANEOUS

C/C++ OOP SIG. Meetings: 4th Weds., Cubberly Community Ctr., 4000 Middlefield Rd., Rm. H-1, Palo Alto. Starts in September. Contact: Jack Reeves, *jack@fx.com* .

Games SIG. Meetings: Cubberly Community Ctr., 4000 Middlefield Rd., Rm. H-1, Palo Alto. Starts in August. Contact: Byron Hale, (408)358-8064 or *blhale@einfo.com* .

Graphic Design Users Group. Meetings: For time and location, call Ed Woods at number below. New group forming for people who use Illustrator, Freehand, Painter, etc. Contact: Ed Woods, (415)461-5985.

IICS Human Interface SIG. Meetings: 4th Tues., 6:30 pm, KQED Board Room, 2601 Mariposa Ave., San Francisco. Refreshments, networking. Contact: Bob Brescia, (415)777-5486.

Marketing SIG Of The Software Forum. Meetings: 2nd Mon., 7:00 pm, Center for Software Development, 111W. St. John St., Ste. 200, San Jose. $10. Call: Stan Trumbull, (408)996-1376 or *strumb@bayarea.net* .

MOBILE

Bay Area Magic Cap User Group (BAMCUG). Meetings: 4th Thurs., 7:00 pm, General Magic, 420 North Mary Ave., Sunnyvale. All Magic Cappers, from novice to advanced nerd status, are invited to attend. Contact: (408)736-5477.

Stanford Newton User Group. Meetings: 2nd and 4th Tues., 7:00 pm, Printer's Inc. Bookstore Cafe, 310 California Ave., Palo Alto. Contact: Flash Sheridan, *snug@pobox.com* or *http://pobox.com/~snug/* .

Multimedia SIG Of The Software Forum. Meetings: 4th Thurs., 7:00 pm, Cubberly Community Ctr., 4000 Middlefield Rd., Rm. H-1, Palo Alto. $10. Call: Larry Shoenberger, (415) 592-3731 or *larrys@hooked.net* .

NETWORKING

Client/Server SIG Of The Software Forum. Meetings: 4th Tues., 7:00 pm, Cubberly Community Ctr., 4000 Middlefield Rd., Rm. H-1, Palo Alto. $10. Call: Neil Goldstein, (408)985-0447, *neilgo@msn.com* or Dave McClure at (415) 842-1800, *daveaslan@msn.com* .

Network Professional's Guild (NPG). Meetings: 2nd Tues., 6:30 pm, 5403 Stevens Creek Blvd., Santa Clara. Network engineering —Windows NT, Novell, Intranet/Internet, and related technologies. Contact: Bill Strouse, (408)323-0701, fax: (408)323-9502, email: *wstrouse@best.com* , URL: *http://www.engineers.com/net/meeting.htm* .

PARADOX

bapals (The Bay Area Paradox Users Group). Meetings: 4th Tues., 4:30 pm, 685 Market St., San Francisco. Call: (415)995-4688.

Delphi SIG Of The Software Forum. Meetings: 2nd Wed., 7:00 pm, KnowledgePoint, 1129 Industrial Ave., Petaluma. $10. Contact: Bjarne Winkler, (415)461-8086 or *nts4618086@aol.com* .

continued on page 104

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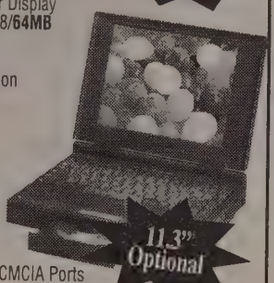

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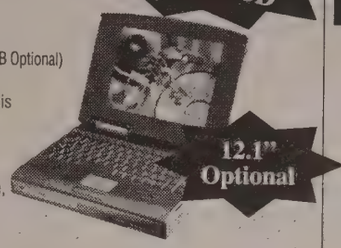

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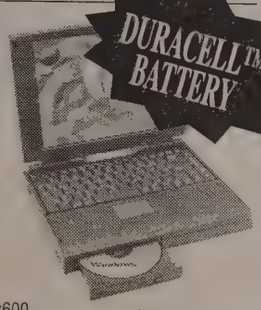

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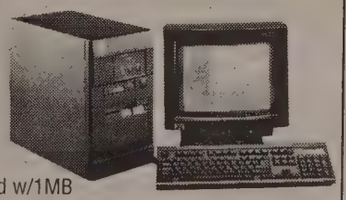

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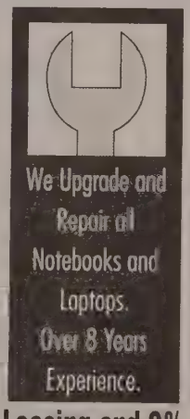

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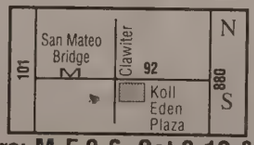

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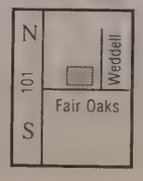

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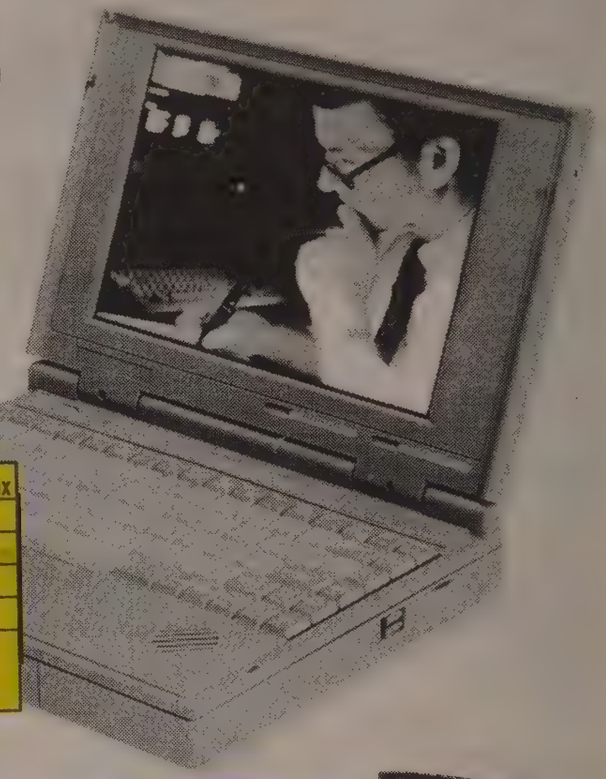

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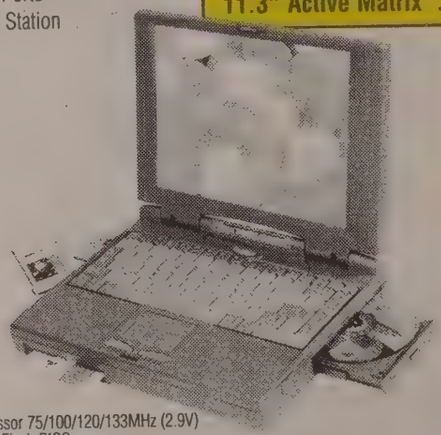

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Pentium®-120MHz	$2075	$2275
Pentium®-133MHz	$2125	$2325
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12.1" Active Matrix.....Add$335		

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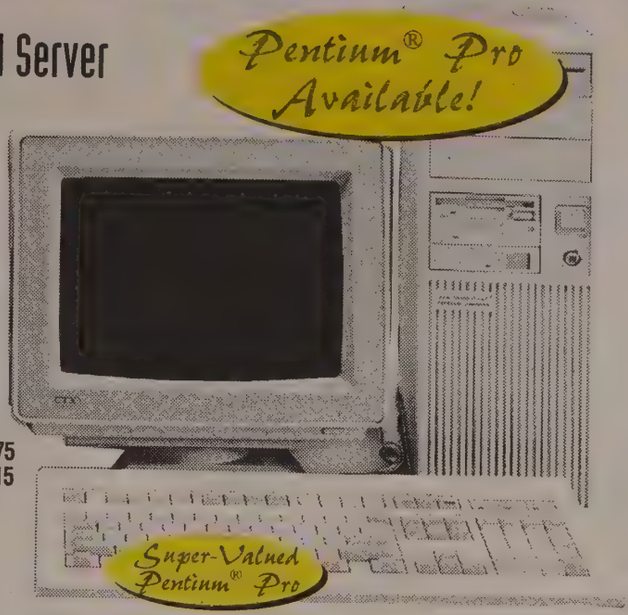

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- Microsoft V2.0 Serial Mouse w/Pad
- Deluxe Super Mini Tower 5-Bay/250W Power Supply
- Toshiba 5602B 8X Internal Enhanced IDE CD-ROM
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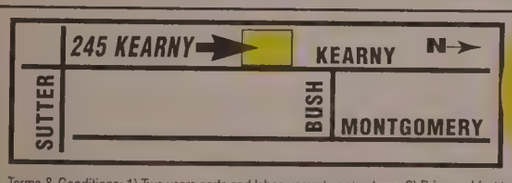

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(User Groups continued from page 100)

Forth Interest Group, North Bay Chapter, and BMUG Forth SIG. Meetings: 2nd Sat., 1 pm, tutorial at noon, 2055 Center St., Berkeley. Call: Leonard Morgenstern, (510)376-5241 or *NLeonard@aol.com* .

Java SIG. Meetings: 1st Monday, Cubberly Community Ctr., 4000 Middlefield Rd., Rm. H-1, Palo Alto. Contact: Tom Hill, (408)996-0650, or *javasig@worldware.com* .

Visual Basic Silicon Valley SIG. Meetings: 2nd Thurs., 7:00 pm, Cubberly Community Ctr., 4000 Middlefield Rd., Rm. H-1, Palo Alto. $10. Call: Allan Colby, (415)851-4567 or *71257.760@compuserve.com* .

Visual Basic-San Francisco SIG. Meetings: 3rd Thurs., 6:30 pm, Terrace Systems, 450 Sansome St. at Clay, Ste. 1250, San Francisco. Contact: Bill Storage, (415)495-6396, or *75250.1360@compuserve.com* .

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UNIX SIG. Meetings: 2nd Tues., 7:00 pm, Amdahl Corp., 1250 E. Arques Ave., Sunnyvale. $10. Call: George Bosworth, (415) 851-3304 or *georgeb@netcom.com* .

WINDOWS

Bay Area Windows NT User Group. Meetings: 1st Sat., 1:00 pm, U.C. Berkeley. Using Windows NT in Internet/Intranet environments. Contact: (510) 528-9895, or *edwin@wyp.net* , or URL: *http://wyp.net/users/ntgroup/*

BMUG Windows SIG. Meetings: 1st Tues., 6:30 pm, BMUG office, 2055 Center St., Berkeley. Call: Robin, (510)527-8993.

Official Northern California Windows NT User Group. Meetings: 1st Weds., even-numbered months, 9am–12 noon, 950 Tower Lane, Suite 900, (Microsoft Office) Foster City. All are encouraged to attend regardless of experience. No fee. Contact: Tracy, (415)591-7752 or *tracy@actioninc.com* .

Windows SIG Of The Software Forum. Meetings: 1st Wed., 6:30 pm, Cubberly Community Ctr., 4000 Middlefield Rd., Rm. H-1, Palo Alto. $15. Call: Fran Finnegan, (415)288-4400 or *76244.145@compuserve.com* .

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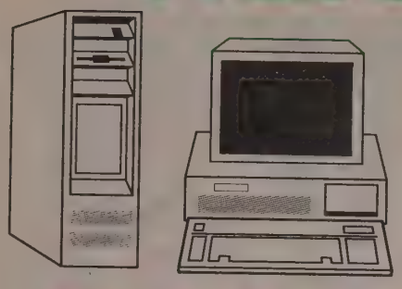

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Advertising Space Reservation: 11/27/96

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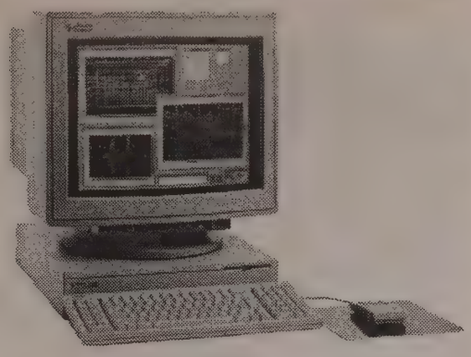

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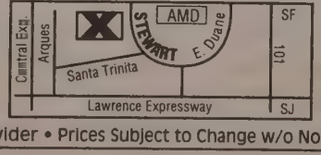

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Telecommuting continued from page 55

ing because of the extra productivity that results—consistently clocked at ten to fifteen percent in nearly every such study during the past two decades.

The organization also saves on expenses. For example, by having half your work force telecommute one day a week, you cut down by ten percent on your need for offices, desks and chairs, bathrooms, copy machines, parking spaces, heating and lighting, and all the rest.

In addition, telecommuting helps the best employees stay longer, saving on recruiting and training costs, and also makes it practical for the organization to reach out another ten, twenty, or thirty miles (or more) in finding qualified people to fill important posts.

Society benefits from telecommuting because it immediately cuts down on air pollution, use of non-renewable energy sources, and traffic congestion.

Practically the only losers in the world of telecommuting are those companies who haven't yet shifted to it, and those co-workers who feel jealous because they' re not yet allowed to work this easier, better way.

How To Telecommute

The basic idea of telecommuting is to replace or supplement physical travel to the office by using modern telecommunications equipment to bring office resources and information out to the person.

Rather than do all their work at a central office, telecommuters work at least part of the time at home, in their cars, from clients' offices, and/or in hotel rooms and telephone booths. By using portable computers to link into company data networks, fax machines to send and receive documents, and telephones to conduct meetings and to interact with colleagues and support staff, telecommuters can accomplish at a distance everything—or nearly everything—they can accomplish in the office.

By carrying pagers and frequently dialing into the organization's voice mail system, telecommuters can remain in close, frequent contact not only with co-workers, but with clients or customers who expect rapid callbacks at a moment's notice.

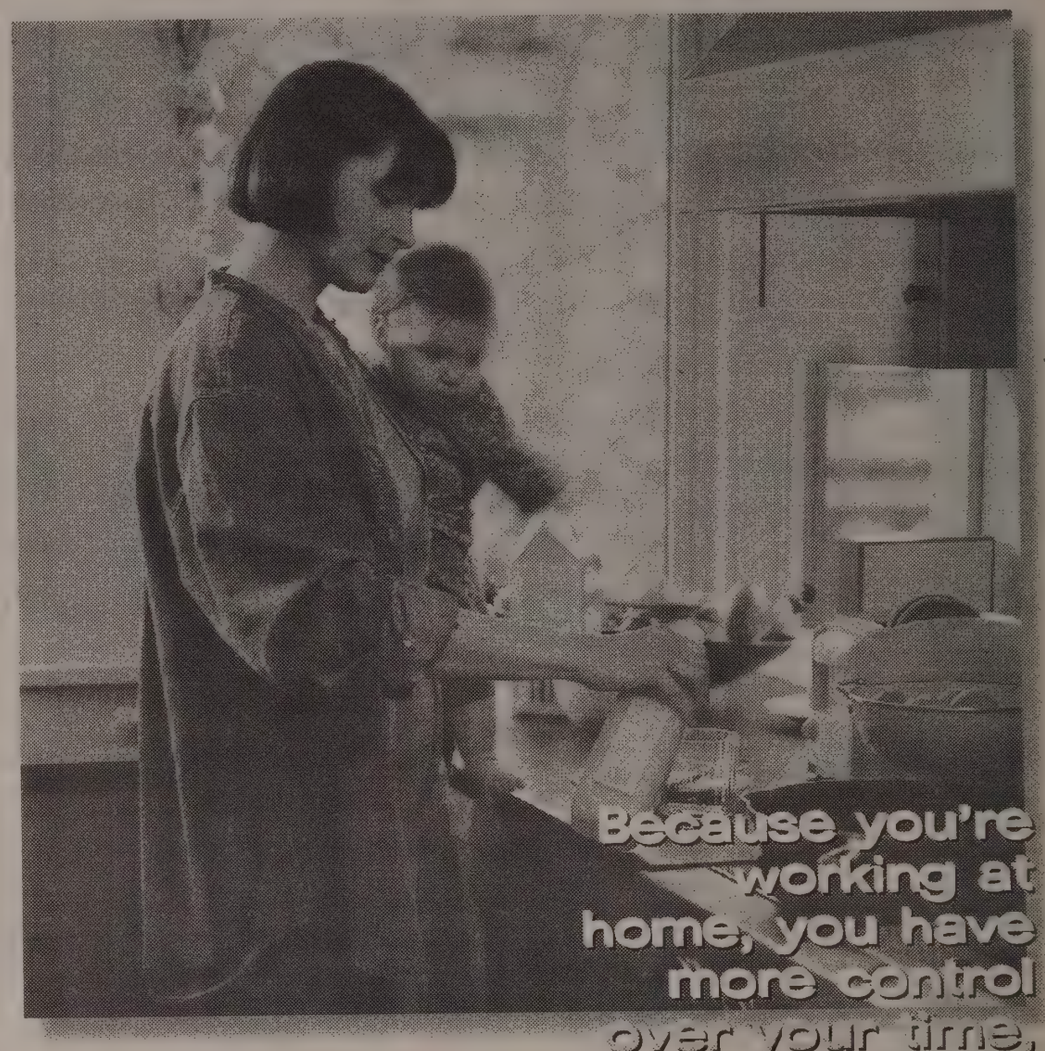
Meanwhile, a "core" group of employees at the central office provides secretarial, administrative, and support services during normal business hours for those who are in the office that day, as well as those who are telecommuting.

A few people still think of telecommuting as a fringe activity not fit for mainstream organizations. They argue that people who escape direct observation by front-line supervisors will not be productive enough to justify their employment. But years of experience have demonstrated that telecommuting, properly planned and administered, is actually a very efficient alternative to traditional office-centered activity.

Employers in telecommunications, insurance, pharmaceuticals, computer hardware and software, manufacturing, utilities, and other industries, as well as government agencies, are noting major productivity gains directly from telecommuting.

Telecommuting Tips

One pattern that has emerged in successful telecommuting programs is to have employees spend at least one or two days in a centralized office. This gives everyone the chance to remain part of the office team, to reconnect with colleagues and project timetables, to attend important meetings, and to demonstrate to supervisors that they are keeping up with their responsibilities.


Because you're working at home, you have more control over your time, more flexibility to take a short break and change a diaper or drive a child to a friend's house, more freedom to cook your family a nice meal, and less pressure to keep every minute crammed with useful activities.

In this model, the "core offices" can become something like "drop-in centers," with shared work spaces containing a desk, a phone, and a jack connecting the portable computer to the data network. There should also be secretarial support, meeting rooms, and office equipment. Unlike traditional office space, however, telecommuting means you need fewer such work spaces for a given number of employees.

It's a myth that to be a telecommuter, you have to kiss the office goodbye. In fact, the vast majority of telecommuters still work in the office three or four days per week, and telecommute only one or two. You can telecommute more often, of course, but it's not necessary in order to gain the benefits.

Certain jobs—such as telemarketing, computer programming, writing and editing, administration, and executive decision-making—convert to telecommuting more easily than others. But almost every office job has components—thinking, writing, reading, planning, telephone contact, computer work, and more—that can be done while telecommuting.

In many offices, employees restructure their activities to accommodate telecommuting. For example, instead of using a few paper-based files every day, people save up their work with the paper files and do it during the days they are in the central office . Then they do other parts of their job on the days they are telecommuting.

Managers, too, can adapt. Those who like to "call a quick meeting" can learn to put distant telecommuters on a speaker phone or a conference call with those who are in the office.

Telecommuting also seems to work best when the employees selected for this mode of work are screened, evaluated, and trained. Skill in time management and goal-orientation help telecommuters deliver their results on time so that others—who themselves may be telecommuters—can rely on them in fulfilling their own responsibilities.

The most effective telecommuters are those who develop specific goals to achieve, and who have their success measured by results rather than by hours clocked or meetings attended.

Success at telecommuting also seems linked to employees who have stronger-than-average motivation and drive to succeed. People must not only master the technology (the computer, the fax, the modem, and the teleconference), they must also master themselves.

Successful telecommuters tend to be independent enough to keep working without the eyes of the supervisor upon them. The ones who enjoy it are those who are self-sufficient enough to stay productive without the hourly feedback and support of colleagues.

Although it may be difficult to establish and maintain a good working relationship by telephone and fax, experience shows that once a telecommuter meets another person and establishes a relationship, the two can accomplish much of their work without frequent face-to-face contact.

Technology For Telecommuting

Personal computers are particularly common among telecommuters. In many situations, the first employees to be permitted to telecommute are people who regularly use a computer, such as programmers or graphics specialists.

Using a computer at home is often one of the easiest and most effective ways to telecommute. That's why executives and other white-collar employees will often save their computer work for the days they telecommute, and will use their time at the central office for meetings and other relatively low-tech activities. In fact, it's common for fledgling telecommuters to begin using a personal computer specifically to increase their telecommuting capabilities.

Although you can telecommute and use a computer in "stand-alone" mode, you'll probably want your computer equipped with a modem so it can send and receive information over standard telephone lines. In some cases, this capability will allow you to dial in to your office network from home and perform all the same computer work you can do right from your desk.

It will also allow your computer to communicate with lots of other computers, enabling you to connect to the Internet, the World Wide Web, CompuServe, America Online, Prodigy, and other computerized information services. Once connected, you can send and receive files, exchange electronic mail, and do other tasks that help you accomplish your job at a distance from your company's offices.

In addition, if you're spending a lot of time working at home, or doing certain kinds of work, you may want additional equipment—a fax, a copier, a printer, a second telephone line (dedicated to business calls), and perhaps even a scanner.

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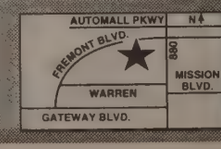

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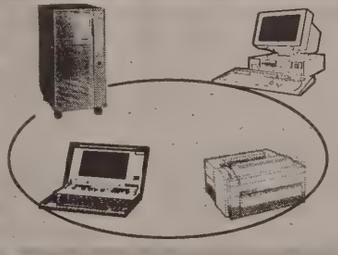

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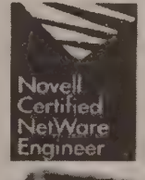

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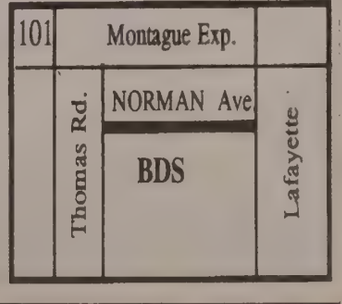

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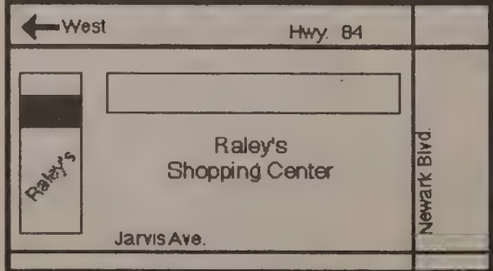

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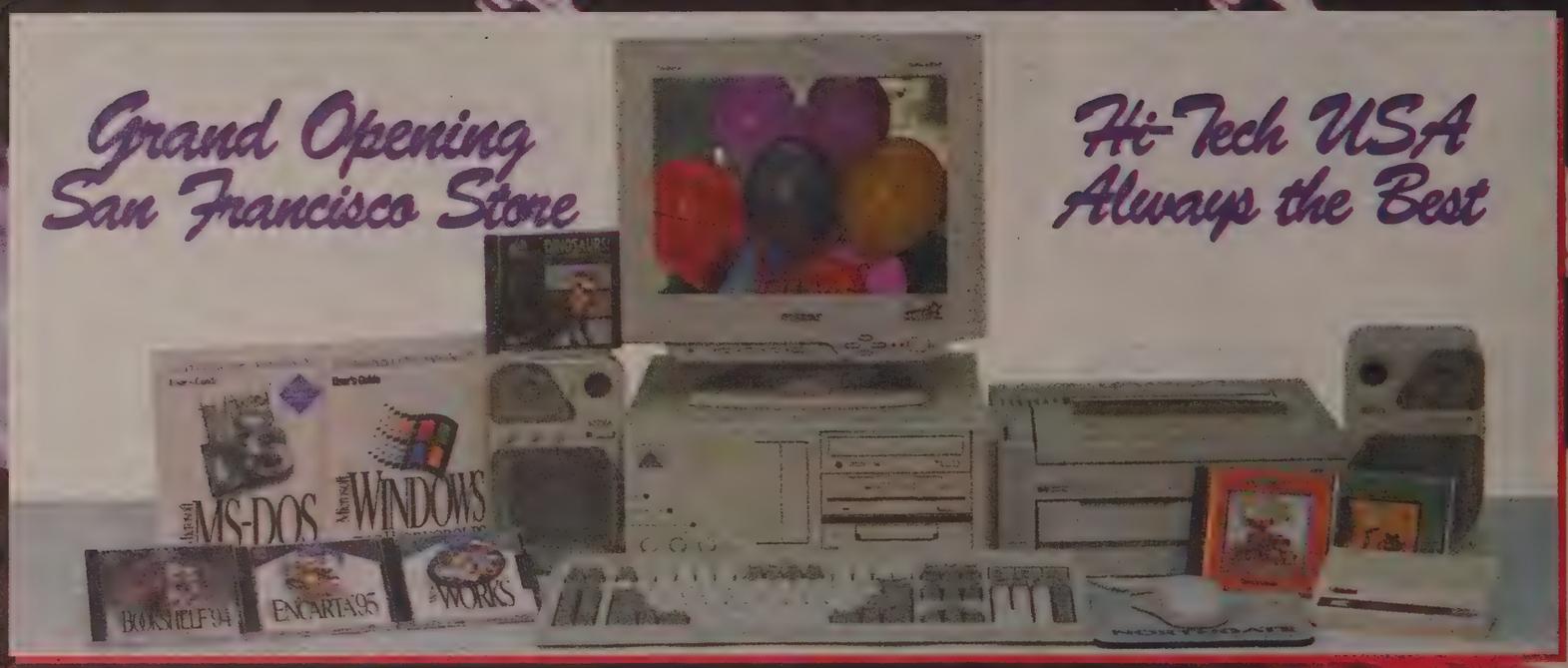

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5X86-133/256K VPCI	124
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P5-100/256K PCI (Pipelined Cache)	218
P5-120/256K PCI (Pipelined Cache)	248
P5-133/256K PCI (Pipelined Cache)	318
P5-150/256K PCI (Pipelined Cache)	388
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ASUS	
486DX4-100/256K VLB-PCI	$148
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P5-133/256K PCI (TRITON) (Pipelined Cache)	378
P5-150/256K PCI (TRITON) (Pipelined Cache)	448
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P5-120/256K PCI (ATLANTIS PIPELINED CACHE)	378
P5-133/256K PCI (ATLANTIS PIPELINED CACHE)	448
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P5-100/256K PCI (MARL) ATX	288
P5-120/256K PCI (MARL) ATX	308
P5-133/256K PCI (MARL) ATX	378
P5-150/256K PCI (MARL) ATX	448
P5-166/256K PCI (MARL) ATX	568
Pentium Pro PP-200 PCI (VENUS) ATX	858
SUPER MICRO Pentium Pro PP-200 PCI	888
SUPER MICRO DUAL Pentium Pro PP-200 PCI	1,748

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CD-ROM 4X 4-Speed IDE Int	47
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NEC 4X 4-Speed / 6X 6-Speed IDE Int.	47 / 72
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SONY 4X 4-Speed IDE Int.	50
SONY 4X 4-Speed SCSI Int.	94
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Toshiba 4X 4-Speed SCSI Int.	105
Speakers 25 Watt/40 Watt/80 Watt	14 / 16 / 20
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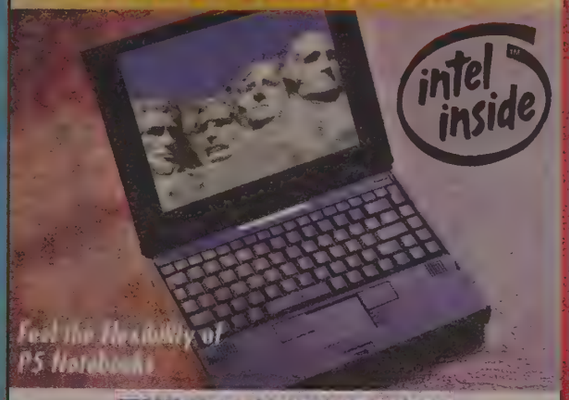
Sound Blaster 32 PNP	114
Sound Blaster Value CD 4X	222
Sound Blaster Discovery CD 8X	332

HI-TECH P5 Notebooks



STANDARD CONFIGURATIONS

- 8MB RAM (please see upgrades)
- 540MB HDD (please see upgrades)
- Removable 1.44 Floppy Drive
- 2MB Display Memory
- Built-In Pointing Device
- Carrying Case
- 32-Bit PCI Bus
- Built-in Sound Card and Speaker
- NIMH Battery
- One Type III or Two Type II PCMCIA Slots
- FREE DOS 6.x
- CD-ROM / LI-ION Battery Option

HI-TECH P5 NOTEBOOKS	Dual Scan Color (11.3")	Active Matrix Color (10.4")	Active Matrix Color (12.1")
P5-75	$1,788	$2,028	$2,378
P5-100	$1,818	$2,058	$2,408
P5-120	$1,838	$2,078	$2,428
P5-133	$1,908	$2,148	$2,498
P5-150	$1,978	$2,218	$2,568

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To 16MB / 24MB	Add $140 / 270
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PCMCIA Fax Modem 14,400	Add $56
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PCMCIA LAN Adapter (10Base-T & Twist)	Add $115
Extra Battery Pak NiMH / LI-ION	Add $130 / 240
AC Adapter / Car Adapter	Add $85 / 100
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HI-TECH CD-ROM Notebooks

STANDARD CONFIGURATIONS

- 8MB RAM (please see upgrades)
- 540MB HDD (please see upgrades)
- 6-Speed CD-ROM
- Removable 1.44 Floppy Drive
- 2MB Display Memory
- Built-In Pointing Device
- 32-Bit PCI Bus
- Built-in Sound Card and Speaker
- NIMH Battery
- One Type III or Two Type II PCMCIA Slots
- FREE DOS 6.x
- Mini Docking Station Option

HI-TECH CD-ROM NOTEBOOKS	Dual Scan Color (11.3")	Active Matrix Color (10.4")	Active Matrix Color (12.1")
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P5-100	$1,948	$2,178	$2,548
P5-120	$1,968	$2,198	$2,568
P5-133	$2,038	$2,268	$2,638
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HI-TECH EXTRA VALUE UPGRADES

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To 1.0GB / 1.3GB Hard Drive	Add $130 / 270
PCMCIA Fax Modem 14,400	Add $56
PCMCIA Fax Modem 28.8 w/V.34	Add $134
PCMCIA LAN Adapter (10Base-T & Twist)	Add $115
Extra Battery Pak NiMH / 57.6W	Add $130 / 200
AC Adapter / Car Adapter	Add $85 / 100
Mini Docking Station	Add $220

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4	4
Challenge Pack	10
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Desert Storm	7
Desktop Publisher's Dream 1994	6
Dinosaur	7
Doom Shareware	7
Family Choice	14
Family Doctor	14
Family Health Tracker	5
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Playing with Language – Japan	14
Playing with Language – Spanish	14
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US Battle Tank	7
US Bomber	7
US History DOS/MAC	11
USA Wars – Civil War	18
USA Wars – Korea	18
Window Programs	6
World Wide Web Source	6

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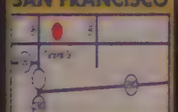

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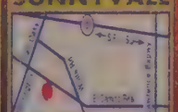
SUNNYVALE



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Smart 420/ 650 / 1000 ..... 238 / 288 / 394
Optiquest UPS 280E / 420E ..... 108 / 158

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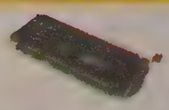

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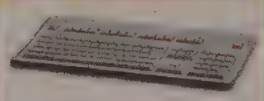

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486DX4-100 28
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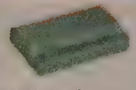
Cyrix 6X86 P-133+ 138
Cyrix 6X86 P-150+ 168
Cyrix 6X86 P-166+ 268
Intel P5-75 / 100 / 120 ..... 94 / 134 / 148
Intel P5-133 / 150 /166 ..... 218 / 298 / 418
Intel Pentium Pro-200 598

MODEMS & FAXES



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Fax Modem 33.6 with V.34 Int 82
Fax Modem 33.6 with Voice Int 96
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PCMCIA Fax Modem 14,400 w/Voice 56
PCMCIA Fax Modem 28,800 w/V.34 134

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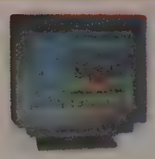

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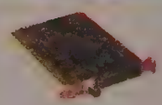

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Stealth 64 PCI 2MB (VRAM) 196
Stealth 64 VLB 2MB (VRAM) 168
Stealth 64 PCI 4MB (VRAM) 298
Viper-Pro PCI 4MB (VRAM) Retail 388
Edge 3D PCI 1MB (DRAM) 114
Edge 3D PCI 2MB (DRAM) Retail 198
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PP-200C PCI (INTEL VENUS M/B) ATX	288	858	N/A	1118	1178	1268	N/A	1318	1398	1518
P5-166C PCI (INTEL MARL M/B) ATX	168	568	N/A	828	888	978	N/A	1028	1108	1228
P5-150C PCI (INTEL MARL M/B) ATX	168	448	N/A	708	768	858	N/A	908	988	1108
P5-133C PCI (INTEL MARL M/B) ATX	168	378	N/A	638	698	788	N/A	838	918	1038
P5-166C PCI (INTEL ATLANTIS M/B)**	228	628	$788	818	878	968	$938	988	1068	1188
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P5-133C PCI (INTEL ATLANTIS M/B)**	228	438	598	628	688	778	748	798	878	998
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P5-75C PCI (INTEL ATLANTIS M/B)**	228	318	478	508	568	658	628	678	758	878
P5-166C PCI (INTEL ENDEAVOR M/B)**	174	578	738	768	828	918	918	968	1048	1168
P5-150C PCI (INTEL ENDEAVOR M/B)**	174	458	618	648	708	798	798	848	928	1048
P5-133C PCI (INTEL ENDEAVOR M/B)**	158	368	528	558	618	708	708	758	838	958
P5-120C PCI (INTEL ENDEAVOR M/B)**	158	298	458	488	548	638	638	688	768	888
P5-100C PCI (INTEL ENDEAVOR M/B)**	158	278	438	468	528	618	618	668	748	868
P5-75C PCI (INTEL ENDEAVOR M/B)**	158	248	408	438	498	588	588	638	718	838
P5-166C PCI (INTEL ENDEAVOR II M/B)	148	548	708	738	798	888	888	938	1018	1138
P5-150C PCI (INTEL ENDEAVOR II M/B)	148	428	588	618	678	768	768	818	898	1018
P5-133C PCI (INTEL ENDEAVOR II M/B)	148	358	518	548	608	698	698	748	828	948
P5-120C PCI (INTEL ENDEAVOR II M/B)	148	288	448	478	538	628	628	678	758	878
P5-100C PCI (INTEL ENDEAVOR II M/B)	118	268	428	458	518	608	608	658	738	858
P5-75C PCI (INTEL ENDEAVOR II M/B)	118	238	398	428	488	578	578	628	708	828
P5-166C PCI**	88	498	648	678	728	818	828	878	948	1068
P5-150C PCI**	88	378	528	558	608	698	708	758	828	948
P5-133C PCI**	88	308	458	488	538	628	638	688	758	878
P5-120C PCI**	88	238	388	418	468	558	568	618	688	808
P5-100C PCI**	88	208	358	388	438	528	538	588	658	778
P5-75C PCI**	88	178	328	358	408	498	508	558	628	748
CYRIX 6X86-P166+/256K PCI	128	378	528	558	608	698	708	758	828	948
CYRIX 6X86-P150+/256K PCI	128	278	428	458	508	598	608	658	728	848
CYRIX 6X86-P133+/256K PCI	128	248	398	428	478	568	578	628	698	818
5X86-133C VLB (PCI: ADD $15)	54	94	244	274	324	414	424	474	544	664
486DX4-100C VLB (PCI: ADD $15)	54	74	224	254	304	394	404	454	524	644
486DX2-80C VLB (PCI: ADD $15)	54	68	218	248	298	388	398	448	518	638

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CYRIX 6X86-P133+/256K PCI.....598
CYRIX 6X86-P150+/256K PCI.....628
CYRIX 6X86-P166+/256K PCI.....728
P5-75/256K PCI*.....538
P5-100/256K PCI*.....568
P5-120/256K PCI*.....588
P5-133/256K PCI*.....658
P5-150/256K PCI*.....728
P5-166/256K PCI*.....848

* Intel Endeavor/Atlantis M/B.....+$90/100
* Intel Marl Motherboard ATX.....+$140

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- Microsoft Windows 95 Full Copy.....Add $72
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486DX4-100/256K VLB or PCI.....558
5X86-133/256K VLB OR PCI.....578
CYRIX 6X86-P133+/256K PCI.....708
CYRIX 6X86-P150+/256K PCI.....738
CYRIX 6X86-P166+/256K PCI.....838
P5-75/256K PCI*.....648
P5-100/256K PCI*.....678
P5-120/256K PCI*.....698
P5-133/256K PCI*.....768
P5-150/256K PCI*.....838
P5-166/256K PCI*.....958

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* Intel Marl Motherboard ATX.....+$140

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P5-166/256K PCI (Intel Atlantis).....1,178

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- Free Microsoft Windows 95
- Free Microsoft Mouse with Pad
- Monitor Sold Separately

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P5-100/256K PCI (Intel Marl) ATX.....1,048
P5-120/256K PCI (Intel Marl) ATX.....1,068
P5-133/256K PCI (Intel Marl) ATX.....1,138
P5-150/256K PCI (Intel Marl) ATX.....1,208
P5-166/256K PCI (Intel Marl) ATX.....1,328
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Endeavor pentium®100/256K Pipeline PCI	324
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Intel Triton pentium®100/256K Pipeline PCI	230
Intel Triton pentium®90/256K Pipeline PCI	220
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486DX4-100/256K VLB AMD/PCI IDE I/O	115/125
486 DX4-80 /256K VLB AMD/PCI IDE I/O	115/125
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150 MHz	705	100 MHz	552
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166 MHz	2279
150 MHz	2163
133 MHz	2079
120 MHz	2020
100 MHz	2010
90 MHz	2000
75 MHz	1976

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* Intel Pentium® processor
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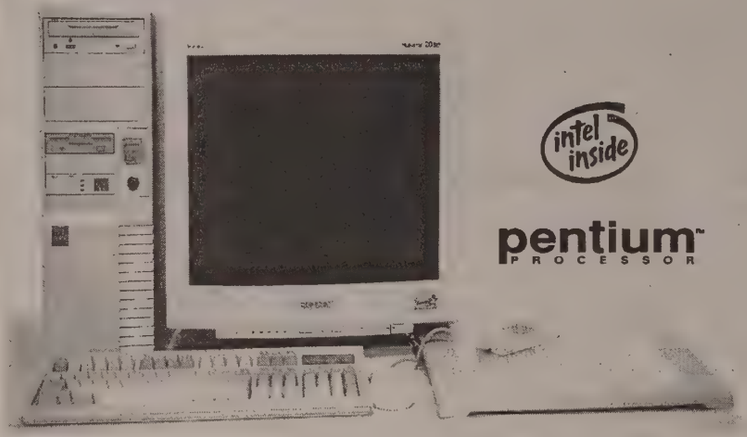

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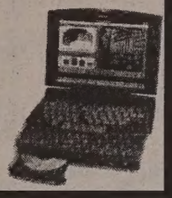

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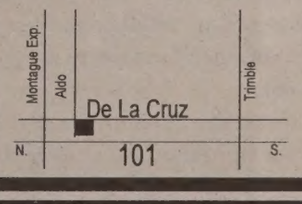

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(Tips & Picks continued from page 72)

traveler is likely to encounter whether at el aeropuerto, la farmacia, or la fiesta. An instructor delivers correctly pronounced phrases, and you record your ever-improving attempts using your Mac or PC's microphone. Whether you're planning a trip to a Spanish-speaking country or just trying to figure out what's going on on Sabado Gigante, this software is a useful learning tool, on its own or as a complement to a formal Spanish class. (Other languages including Japanese are also available in the series.)

Best General Advice

Jason Boatman: As Technical Services Director, I'm asked this question all the time, and it continues to become more and more difficult to answer: do you recommend a Mac or a PC? Here's what I suggest:

Do you use a computer at work? Is it a Windows machine? Will you be using the same applications at home as you will be at work? If that's the case, I'd tend to lean towards the PC side—just from the perspective of familiarity (and investment in time) with a single operating system. If you use Windows at work, then start using Windows at home, you're bound to learn more about your system at work and vice-versa. Also, it's amazing how inexpensive PC systems have become.

In all other cases: get a Macintosh. For out-of-the-box ease-of-use, they simply can't be beat. Likewise, for inexperienced users, it's much easier to configure and use peripherals: buy a laser printer or CD-ROM or monitor, plug it in, and it will work. Same goes for software—Apple systems are simply integrated better. For publishing or working with any type of media like sound or video, the Mac is hands-down the winner.

Cassidy Allen: Understand what you're going to be using your computer for. It's nice to have a top-of-the-line machine, but do you really need it? And if you buy that beautifully portable laptop, will you take it anywhere? It's surprising how many people buy high-end PowerMacs or PCs costing $4000 and up, and then use them solely for email and word processing.

By knowing your computing needs, you can make an educated, logical purchase and probably save yourself a decent amount of money, which you can then spend on important extras such as a printer, scanner, or software.

Ed Kahn: When you go into a computer store to buy your first computer system, the tendency of salesmen is to try to sell you a bulldozer rather than a shovel.

Power sounds great, but you can easily spend a lot of money for more than you need. This is particularly true in software. Without trying, you can spend several thousand dollars on features you will never use and on software that is more difficult to learn.

My best advice is to start out with simple software; after you feel you have outgrown it, move up to what you need. You may just find that you never outgrow the entry-level software.

Kevin Savetz: Make your computer work area as comfortable as you possibly can. Whether you use your computer for work or play, the time that you spend in front of the grey box should be as easy on your body as it can be.

Invest in a comfortable desk chair. If your hands ache after a few hours at the computer, get an ergonomic keyboard and mouse. As a longtime computer user who has flirted with back and hand pain, let me tell you: spend the time and money to evaluate and improve your computer work space. It is not worth suffering in pain or finding yourself unable to lift a pencil just because you were careless with your work habits. ■

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Bungie Software (Marathon)
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Global Village (Modems)
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HyperGlot Software Co., Inc.
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Prodigy (Online Service)
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Shufflepuck Café (Game)
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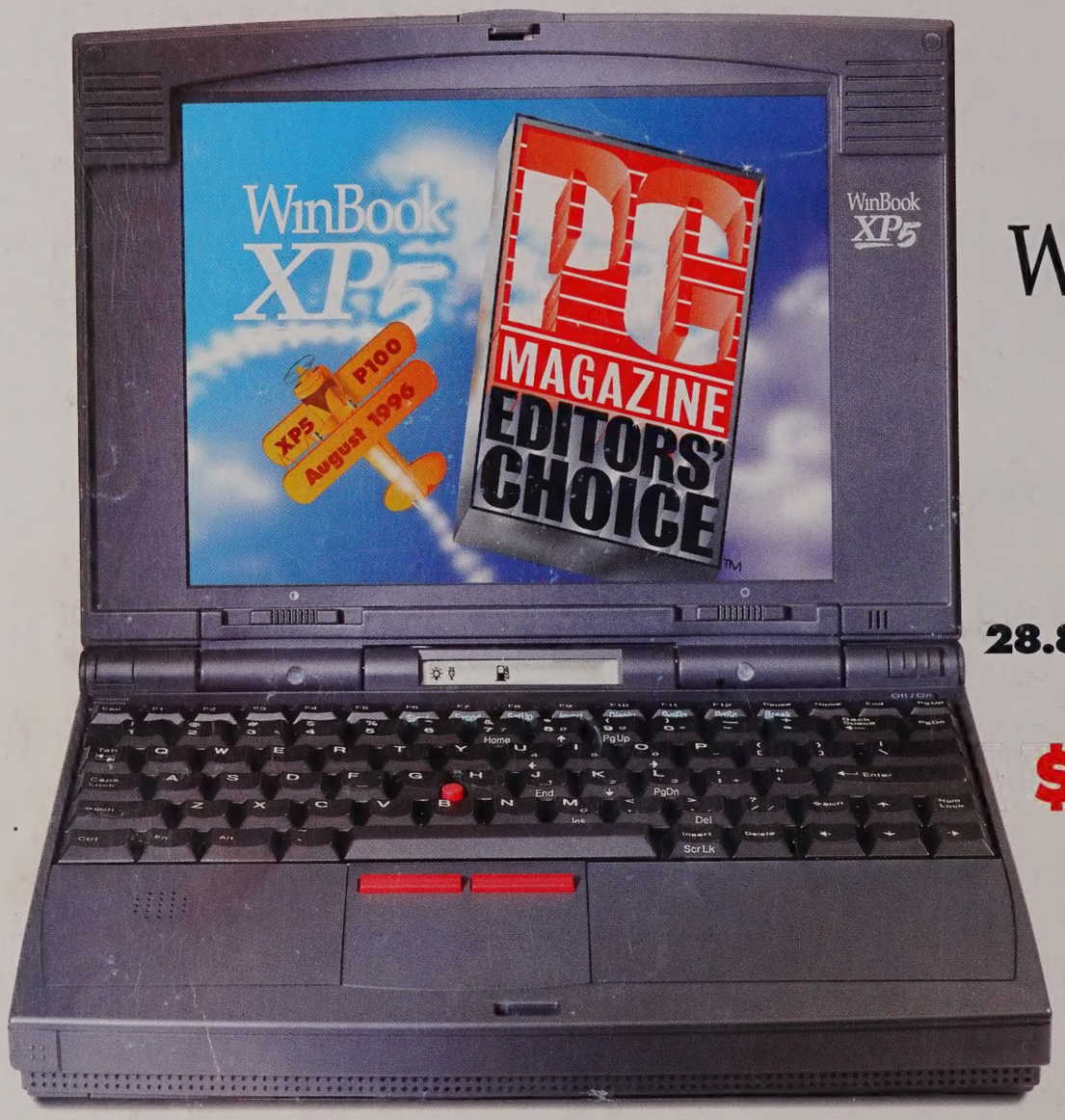

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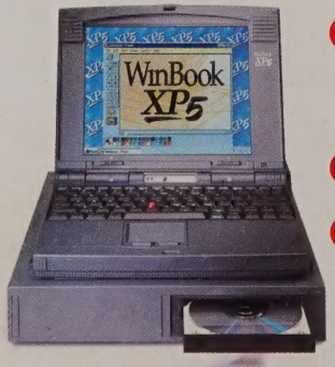

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